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BOSTON
HEALTH
NOTES

Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission and

Mayor Thomas M. Menino

March 2000

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) is the city's local health department. Our mission is to protect, preserve, and promote the health and well being of Boston residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. BPHC Programs include Homeless Services, Substance Abuse Services, Family & Child Health Initiatives, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Communicable Disease Control, and Community Initiatives. We offer this new monthly health education column in the hope that it will help you, your family and community live in good health.

by Sharon James, Registered Dietician

Adolescent Wellness Program, Boston Public Health Commission

It's 10:00 AM: Have Your Children Eaten Yet?

Helping Your Kids Eat for Success At ten o'clock most mornings the school nurse's office begins to fill up with children complaining of a stomachache, headache or dizziness. The nurse asks if they have eaten anything yet, and the response is always "no." As a nutritionist, I see far too many kids who skip meals instead of eating breakfast, bringing a lunch or eating the lunch the school provides. A good breakfast can make the difference between passing and failing. The facts prove that children who eat breakfast are better able to concentrate, score better on tests and are less likely to be absent. This month, March, is Nutrition Month: a great opportunity to focus on eating better.

Eating On the Run

More and more children are getting their meals outside of the home. Reports show that outside food is providing 1/3 of our teenager's total calories. Teenagers buy breakfast or lunch from vending machines, convenience stores, and fast food chains: where there are many high calorie choices but few choices of nutritional value. Either way, teens are at high risk for not eating enough key nutrients like protein, Iron and Calcium at a time when their bones and muscles are growing and their brains need good fuel for high school's academic demands. Even moderate undernutrition can have lasting effects on school performance, energy levels and vulnerability to illness.

Make A Plan for Your Family to Eat Better

Nutrition is a family affair. Learn what your child is eating outside of the house. Now is the time for you and your child to prevent eating habits that may lead to weight problems, osteoporosis, or heart disease. Help your child to plan meals and snacks that include fast nutritious foods like milk, cheese, fruits, yogurt, cereals or sandwiches. Then make a plan. Ask your child to commit to one single change he or she is willing to make. For example, buying milk at school instead of a soft drink or making his or her breakfast or lunch during the commercial breaks while watching TV at night. We all need to help our children eat foods that not only taste good but are also good for them.

We Can Help

Nutritionists at the Boston Public School Based Health Centers can also help you and your children eat more healthily. Nutritionists help children with issues of anemia, Hypertension, poor eating habits, weight problems, sports nutrition, food allergies, Diabetes, and excessive dieting. School Based Health Centers, operated by the Boston Public Health Commission, are located in seven Boston high schools.

For more information about School Based Health Centers call Dr. Gisela Morales-Baretto, Associate Director, School Based Health Centers (617) 534-2610. For more information about the nutrition program at the School Based Health Centers, call Sharon James, RD at (617) 534-2343. Find reliable nutrition information on the web at The Tufts University Nutrition Navigator at www.navigator.tufts.edu or the American Dietetic Association's website <http://www.eatright.org> can provide expert advice and direction.

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April 2000

Protecting Your Children: The Importance of Childhood Immunization

By Marie B. Walsh, RN, BSN, Head Nurse, Healthy Baby/ Healthy Child Program (HBHC) and Lynn Washington, RN, BSN, Public Health Nurse, HBHC.

Parents do their best to protect their children from danger. Childhood diseases caused by viruses and bacteria are an invisible –but preventable--danger. Proper immunizations can protect children from these dangers.

April 17-23 National Immunization Week

Boston leads the nation in immunizations with over 90% of young children immunized. However, we would like to make sure that every parent has information about the importance of immunization and every child has the opportunity for proper immunization. Children today who go without immunization are still at risk for dangerous diseases like Diphtheria, Tetanus, Polio, and Measles.

How Vaccines Work

Vaccines work to protect children by causing their immune system to develop antibodies to each disease. Antibodies surround and kill illness-causing organisms before they can start growing. Most vaccine protection will last for many years, and often for a lifetime. Multiple doses of vaccines help a child's immune system develop protection.

Have Your Child Fully Immunized by 18 Months

Children need vaccines at birth and at 1, 2, 4, and 6 months, and at 12 to 18 months of age. Current vaccines may have minor side effects, such as fever, fussiness and swelling at the injection site. Rest assured that symptoms will usually go away within 1-2 days. Even children who are slightly sick can safely receive vaccines.

Getting to the Doctor

Sometimes coordinating everything to get your child's immunizations on time can be challenging. Lynn, one of the HBHC nurses, was able to help one family with six children who were all behind in their immunizations. The provider would see only two children at a time, making it very difficult for this mother. Lynn was able to help the client arrange with the provider to see three children at one time, resulting in fewer trips to the doctor. If you are having problems getting to the doctor, talk to your child's doctor or nurse about how to make it easier for you.

If your child doesn't have a doctor or health insurance, call the Mayor's Health Line at (617) 534-5050 or 1-800-847-0710. All children in Massachusetts under the age of 19 are eligible for free or low-cost health insurance, and the Mayor's Health Line can help you enroll.

Save Immunization Records

Remember to bring your child's immunization record with you to every visit. This will help ensure that your child is up to date and you may even be able to remind your child's doctor when your child needs her next immunizations. The Boston Public Health Commission also maintains an immunization registry.

For More Information

For more information on immunizations and the diseases that they prevent, please call the Boston Public Health Commission CDC Program at (617) 534-5611.

The Healthy Baby /Healthy Child Program (BPHC) provides home visiting to pregnant and parenting residents of Boston by Public Health Nurses and/or Neighborhood Health Advocates. We can be contacted at (617) 534-5832 for more information, or if you would like our services.

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May 2000

Got Asthma? Get Exercise!

by Margaret Reid, RN, Director, Asthma Prevention and Control Program, Boston Public Health Commission.

Asthma is the most common chronic childhood illness, affecting 6 million children in the United States. Boston has double the rate of hospitalizations for children with asthma than the rate for the state of Massachusetts. Some neighborhoods of Boston have 5 times the statewide rate. Asthma makes it hard to breathe by causing the tubes which carry air in and out of the lungs to tighten, swell and fill up with thick mucus. Asthma can not be cured, but with the right treatment it can be controlled.

Many people believe that if you have asthma you should not exercise. Some people have a condition called Exercise Induced Asthma where they cough, wheeze or get short of breath soon after starting to exercise. All people need exercise, even those people with exercise induced asthma, and done under the right conditions, exercise can even help improve asthma.

What are the right conditions?

1. First speak with your Health Care Provider before starting an exercise program.
2. Always have your quick relief (or rescue) medicine (albuterol, which is also called Ventolin or Proventil) with you. Your HCP may tell you to take it 15 minutes before starting exercise.
3. Let your coach, teammates or friends know ahead of time that you have asthma.
4. Warm up before exercise and cool down after exercise.
5. Take a break if you feel your asthma starting.
6. Be aware of the physical environment you are exercising in. Is it really cold? Cold air can trigger an asthma episode. If it is very cold, go inside or put a scarf over your nose and mouth. Is it hot and humid? Some people with asthma may have trouble breathing when it is very hot or humid. Are there lots of cars or cigarette smoke where you are exercising? Smoke and pollution can be very irritating to the airways of people with asthma. There may be a better time or place to exercise.
7. Sports which have breaks in the activity, like swimming and baseball, may be especially good for people with asthma.

Some programs for children with asthma combine swimming with asthma education. During the month of May - Asthma and Allergy Month--the Boston Public Health Commission, the Boston Community Centers and a host of community groups, hospitals and asthma organizations are hosting free swim days to promote the benefits of swimming and exercise for asthma.

During the month of May, pools in the following community centers will be hosting free asthma swim events between 1:00 and 4:00 on these Saturdays:

- May 6 Madison Park Community Center, 55 New Dudley Street, Roxbury (kickoff!)
- May 13 Harborside Community Center, 312 Border Street, East Boston
- May 20, Curtis Hall Community Center, 20 South Street, Jamaica Plain

The American Lung Association, the Flying Fish Asthma Education and Swimming Program at the MassGeneral Hospital for Children and the Project HEALTH Asthma Swimming Program of Boston Medical Center will provide free swims and sign up children for asthma swim programs.

If you come to swim or even just check out the event, you may be eligible to walk away with allergy reducing mattress and pillow covers, T-shirts and community center memberships.

Visitors to Asthma Swim Days will also have the opportunity to sign up for free or low cost health insurance for your children, with the help of Insuring the Future community outreach workers. For more information about health insurance and access to quality health care, call the Mayor's Health Line at (617) 534-5050 or 1- (800)-847-0710.

To learn more about how to manage asthma or to join a swim program in your neighborhood, call the Boston Public Health Commission Asthma Prevention and Control Program at (617) 534-5966.

1. First speak with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.
 2. Always have your quick relief (or rescue) medicine (inhaler) with you. Your HCP may tell you to take it 15 minutes before starting exercise.
 3. Let your coach, instructor or fitness know ahead of time that you have asthma.
 4. Warm up before exercise and cool down after exercise.
 5. Take a break if you feel your asthma starting.
 6. Be aware of the physical environment you are exercising in. Is it really cold? Cold air can irritate the asthma episode. It is very cold, go inside or put a scarf over your nose and mouth. Is it hot and humid? Some people with asthma may have trouble breathing when it is very hot and humid. The time of day or time of exercise makes a difference when you are exercising. Think and breathe can be very helpful in the ways of people with asthma. There may be a better time or place to exercise.
 7. Sports which have breaks in the activity, like swimming and basketball, may be especially good for people with asthma.
- Some programs for children with asthma combine swimming with asthma education. Contact the teachers of day - Asthma and Allergy Month - the Boston Public Health Commission, the Boston Community Center and a list of community groups, hospitals and asthma organizations are listing the swim days to promote the benefits of swimming and exercise for asthma.

During the month of May, people in the following community centers will be hosting free asthma swim events between 1:00 and 4:00 on their Saturdays:

- May 6 Madison Park Community Center, 55 New Bedford Street, Roxbury (617) 534-5966
- May 13 Harvard Community Center, 312 Boston Street, East Boston
- May 20 Curtis Hall Community Center, 20 South Street, Jamaica Plain

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This Father's Day, take a moment for your children, and for yourself

by Stan A. McLaren, Program Manager, Father Friendly Initiative, Boston Public Health Commission

In June, men across Boston will celebrate Father's Day. A lesser known, but equally important observance is National Men's Health Awareness Week. As you take care of your children, take the time to make sure you're thinking about your own health and well being.

Caring for Your Kids

Current research shows that the involvement of fathers with their children has a significant impact on how children handle life's challenges. With a father's involvement, a child will be more ambitious and confident and less likely to be susceptible to peer pressure.

A local program that focuses on the important role a father has in the life of his children is the Father Friendly Initiative (FFI) of the Boston Public Health Commission. FFI believes that all fathers – regardless of income or education – can play an important role in supporting the mother and in nurturing their child.

Here are some suggestions on how to be involved with your child:

- Spend quality time with your children – Play and read with them. Attend your child's Parent/Teacher meetings. Children want and need your involvement in their lives.
- Show affection – This will let your children know that you love them.
- Support and respect the mother of your children – When the mother and father respect each other, children grow up in a secure, nurturing environment.
- Be a positive role model – Your examples will set the tone for your child's character. Earn the right to be listened to by your child.
- Remember that your child is watching you and your interactions with others.
- "Dads can be the difference" – Have confidence in your ability to be an involved father, because your child deserves it.

Caring for Yourself

It's ironic that most men treat their cars better than they treat their bodies. For cars, men do a lot of preventative maintenance –change the oil, rotate the tires, check the gauges and regularly schedule appointments for tune-ups. The relationship with our bodies should be at least as good as the one we have with our cars.

Here are some suggestions on how to improve your health and feel better:

- Reduce Stress – Maintain a regular exercise schedule. Get a hobby that's relaxing and not work related. Meditate. Try to find a balance in your life.
- Exercise – There are many exercises that will benefit your health, including aerobic exercise, such as walking, jogging, stair climbing, swimming, weight training, and stretching, for increased flexibility. These activities should be done at least three times per week. Get advice from your physician, and a trainer at the local gym or YMCA.
- Eat right – Lower your saturated fat intake, cut down on junk/fast foods, eat more fruits and vegetables, increase fiber intake and drink lots of water.
- Establish a relationship with your personal physician. Use your time wisely with him or her by preparing questions and listing any problems or concerns before the visit. If you're not comfortable with the responses, get a second opinion.

For more information on the Boston Public Health Commission's Father Friendly Initiative, call 534-7725.

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July 2000

Awareness Can Prevent Lead Poisoning

By Laura Melbin, Health Education Coordinator, Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, Boston Public Health Commission

Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

For the second year in a row, Massachusetts' Lead Poisoning Prevention Week will be celebrated in Boston with a Children's Health and Housing Fair in Franklin Park. On July 22, 2000, from 10:00 AM-2:00 PM, families are invited to join the celebration with speakers, games, raffles, entertainment, free food, free lead screenings for children and information on preventing lead poisoning.

Lead Poisoning is Still a Danger

Even at low levels, lead poisoning can cause brain damage and other health problems. The best way to find out if your child has lead poisoning is to have a blood lead test. It is also a good idea to find out immediately if your home contains lead. Your child is at risk for lead poisoning if:

- Your home was built before 1978 (when lead house paint was completely banned)
- Your home is being renovated, which can create lead dust;
- Your home contains painted furniture or toys from before 1978;
- You eat fruits or vegetables from a garden in your yard (soil may have high levels of lead).

Find Out if You Have Lead!

The Boston Public Health Commission Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (LPPP) (617) 534-5966 provides free paint and soil lead inspections to any family who lives in Boston and has a child under six.

Tips to Prevent Lead Poisoning:

- Do not allow your children to eat or drink when playing outside. Make sure they wash their hands and toys well before eating.
- Feed your child foods rich in iron, calcium, and vitamin C, such as peanut butter, raisins, milk products, green vegetables, and oranges.
- Iron, calcium, and vitamin C make it harder for the body to absorb lead.
- Use only the cold water tap for drinking, cooking, or making baby formula. Run the water COLD for two or three minutes to completely flush out the pipes. Never use hot water straight from the tap, because hot water draws the lead out from the pipes.
- Twice a week, wet mop floors and wet wipe window sills and window wells with warm water, paper towels or a sponge, and a high-phosphate cleaner. Throw the sponge away after cleaning.
- Do not sand or scrape painted surfaces.
- Get soil tested in your yard.

Tenants' Rights, Landlords' Responsibilities

The Massachusetts Lead Law requires that every place a child under six lives must be made lead safe. Landlords are required to rent to families who are eligible tenants, and landlords must also pay for the cost of making the apartment safe. The LPPP can work with landlords to see if they are eligible for financial assistance to make apartments safe.

For more information

Please call the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (617) 534-5966. For more information about housing, call the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance at (617) 825-6530. If you have questions about your legal rights, call Greater Boston Legal Services at (617) 357-5757 x3998.

Lead Facts:

- About one-third of lead poisoned children were exposed to lead paint dust because of renovations, such as replacing a window or tearing down a wall.
- Property owners are required by law to remove lead from a home where a child under six lives. Landlords cannot refuse to rent to tenants, or evict them, because of lead paint or because there are children.
- The Lead Poisoning Prevention Program offers free lead inspections. Call (617) 534-5966.

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The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) is the city's local health department. Our mission is to protect, preserve, and promote the health and well being of Boston residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. BPHC Programs include Homeless Services, Substance Abuse Services, Family & Child Health Initiatives, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Communicable Disease Control, and Community Initiatives. We offer this new monthly health education column in the hope that it will help you, your family and community live in good health.

Walk This Way! How to Keep Your Child Safe in Streets, Cars, and School Busses

By Kim Wolski, Director, Childhood Injury Prevention Program (CIPP) & Shabana Shiliwala, CIPP Program Administrator, Boston Public Health Commission

Back-to-school means it's time to think about safety for children—especially for children entering kindergarten. For National Childhood Injury Prevention Week, September 1-7, here are some tips on pedestrian, driving, and school bus safety for parents and kids to make sure this new school year is a safe one!

Pedestrian Safety - Parents often overestimate their children's pedestrian skills. The physical skills necessary to safely cross a street do not develop until at least age 10. The following guidelines will help you teach your children safe street crossing.

- Use every opportunity to model safe walking behavior and teach your children pedestrian rules. Be sure to use crosswalks and cross with the light.
- Stop at the curb; look left, right, then left again before crossing the street.
- Wear light colors during dusk and dark hours.
- Stop, look, and listen before crossing railroad tracks. Stay away from platform edges when waiting for a train.

Car safety - Child safety seats and safety belts, when correctly installed and used, can prevent injury and save lives.

- If you drive your children to school, make sure they have the age-appropriate safety restraint. Also remember that you are their role model, and buckle up!
- Infants, Toddlers, and Small Pre-schoolers: For infants, facing the rear of the car is the safest position! Infants need rear-facing or convertible seats until they are at least 1 year old. Toddlers and small pre-schoolers up to 40 lbs. need forward-facing toddler seats.
- Pre-schoolers or older: Belt-positioning booster seats ensure that the safety belt fits right. Some children may need to use these seats up to 10 years old or 100 lbs.
- Older children: Wear a safety belt. It fits correctly when the lap belt fits over the hips, not the stomach; and the shoulder belt fits over the shoulder, not the neck. Never allow children to put the safety belt behind the back or arm. This may mean the shoulder belt does not fit properly and the child needs to be in a booster seat.

School Bus Safety – Riding a bus without an adult will be a new experience for many children. The following rules can help your child stay safe.

- Drivers, remember to stop behind a school bus that is letting children off or on.
- Young children need you or another adult to help them walk to and wait for the bus.
- Teach these basic bus safety rules:
- Stay 5 giant steps away from the street when waiting for the bus.
- Always cross the street in front of the bus, never behind.
- Stay seated, never stand.
- Don't distract the driver.
- Face forward.
- Keep aisles clear.
- Speak in a soft voice.
- Obey the bus driver.
- Look for cars before stepping off the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, ask the bus driver for help.

For more information contact the Boston Public Health Commission Childhood Injury Prevention Program at 534-5197 or visit these websites for more information: The Boston Public Health Commission, CIPP [http:// www.cityofboston.com/publichealth](http://www.cityofboston.com/publichealth) or the National Safe Kids Campaign at <http://www.safekids.org>.

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Choose Not to Abuse: Preventing Teen Dating Violence

By Maia Brodyfield, Assistant Director, Domestic Violence Program, Boston Public Health Commission

What is Teen Dating Violence?

Debbie started dating Eddie when she was 15 and he was 19. He seems to be devoted to her: calls all the time and goes with her wherever she goes. But it seems like Debbie is changing. Debbie has started to dress differently "because Eddie likes it that way." She's always jumpy and seems to be avoiding friends and family. Last week, she had a bruise on her arm she was trying to hide. And Eddie's friends and family notice that he is constantly checking up on Debbie, paging her, and criticizing her.

Could Debbie or Eddie be teenagers in your life? They are showing many of the signs of being in an abusive relationship. What can a parent or concerned friend do to help?

Relationship Violence Can Affect Anyone

As many as one-third of all high school and college age young people experience violence in an intimate or dating relationship. Two important facts to remember about domestic or dating violence:

- Domestic violence affects all types of people, regardless of sex, race, age, sexual orientation, education, or income, and
- Abuse can be physical or emotional.

Threatening or degrading comments like "No one will ever want you," "If you don't do what I say, you're gonna get hurt" are just as damaging to a teen's health and well-being as getting hit. In addition to the risk of severe injury, an abused teen can suffer from stress-related illness, including stomach-aches, headaches or difficulty sleeping. The damaging effect of abuse on a teenager's self esteem can also lead to a greater risk for substance abuse, HIV and STD exposure, and pregnancy.

How Can You Help?

- The first step is prevention. Talk to your child or friend about healthy, respectful relationships. Let them know that they
- deserve to be safe in a relationship and that resources exist to help them with issues like dating violence.
- Take the opportunity to ask what they think about dating violence. Abusive relationships are often in the news or portrayed on popular TV shows--use these opportunities to talk about whether they are ever afraid in their dating relationship.

- Talk to a pediatrician or a domestic violence advocate. If you feel uncomfortable talking to a doctor, many hospitals and
- community health centers have domestic violence advocates.
- Call a domestic violence hotline.
- Educate yourself. Call the Domestic Violence Program at the Boston Public Health Commission for more information on
- teen dating violence.

Choose Not to Abuse

Teen peer educators helped pick the message “Choose Not to Abuse,” for a campaign of the BPHC Domestic Violence

Program designed to stop abuse before it happens. A media campaign encourages young people to make healthy, non-abusive

choices and a domestic violence prevention curriculum offers teens support and education.

Additional Resources

- Help for you, your teen or friend: Toll-free English/Spanish 24 hour hotline: 1-800-992-2600
- If you are a male in a same-sex relationship and want support and information: Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project: 1-800-832-1901
- If you are a female in a same-sex relationship or a transgendered person: Network for Battered Lesbians and Bisexual
- Women (Spanish/English): 617-423-SAFE
- If you think you may be using abusive behaviors and want help: Department of Public Health Batterer Intervention Program Services (for referrals): 617-624-5497
- Call the Boston Public Health Commission Domestic Violence Program at 617-534-2687 for more information about domestic or dating violence.

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November 2000

MOSQUITO PROOF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: Prevent West Nile Virus

By Suzanne Strickland, Prevention Coordinator
Communicable Disease Control
Boston Public Health Commission

Last summer, we all heard a lot in the news about West Nile Virus (WNV) reaching Boston for the first time. While many birds and some mosquitoes were infected, fortunately, no human cases of the virus were recorded last year. WNV is expected to return this summer. If you take these simple precautions, you can help prevent the virus from infecting anyone in Boston—starting in your own backyard.

What is West Nile Virus?

West Nile Virus (WNV) is a virus that usually causes either no illness or only mild illness, but can cause swelling of the brain or death in a very small number of people. WNV is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes get the virus from biting infected birds. People can't get the virus from another person or directly from an infected bird.

What should I do if I get bitten by a mosquito?

WNV is very rare. Most mosquitoes don't carry the virus. Even if you are bitten by a mosquito that carries the virus, you probably won't feel sick. However, you should see your doctor immediately if you develop high fever, confusion, severe headache, stiff neck, or if your eyes become sensitive to light.

What should I do if I find a dead bird?

If you find a dead bird that you suspect has WNV, call the city of Boston Animal Control Office at 617-635-5348. Some of these birds will be collected and sent to the State Lab for testing.

How Can I Protect Myself?

Follow these guidelines to prevent mosquito bites:

Try to limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn. If you are going to be outside during these times, wear a long sleeved shirt, long pants and socks.

Consider using a mosquito repellent that contains DEET and follow the directions on the label. When using DEET on children, use concentrations of no more than 10%. Do not apply DEET on infants. Make sure window and door screens don't have holes in them. Screens in good repair will help prevent mosquitoes from getting inside your house.

Follow these steps to prevent mosquitoes from breeding:

Mosquitoes need water to breed. Make sure that items like these don't collect water.

Containers- Turn over or cover containers such as unused flower pots, garbage cans, and wheelbarrows.

Gutters- Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water.

Pools- Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use.

Birdbaths- Change the water frequently. Twice a week is ideal.

Old Tires- Cover or remove. They are one of mosquitoes' favorite places to breed.

Check in on older relatives and neighbors to help with these mosquito prevention steps. People over 65 are more likely to become seriously ill if infected with WNV.

The Boston Public Health Commission is working to prevent WNV through education about how to reduce mosquito breeding sites and about how to prevent mosquito bites. To expand outreach efforts, the BPHC funded nine community-based organizations with mini-grants: the

Allston- Brighton Healthy Boston Coalition, Brookside Community Health Center, City Year Boston, Dimock Community Health Center, Madison Park Development Corporation, Neighborhood Pesticide Action Committee, Project R.I.G.H.T., Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, and Uphams Corner Community Health Center.

The Commission is also placing larvacide in the City's catch basins (drainage openings below the street), another favorite breeding site of mosquitoes. The larvacide being used is an Environmental Protection Agency-approved pesticide that acts to prevent larvae (young mosquitoes) from becoming adults. The City of Boston is also playing a role in tracking mosquitoes, mosquito larvae, and birds to detect any WNV activity as early as possible.

For more information call the Commission at 617- 534-2362 or see our website at www.cityofboston.com/publichealth

Other Resources

To report a dead bird, call the City of Boston Animal Control Office at 617-635-5348 or call the State Department of Public Health's WNV Hotline at 1-866-MASS-WNV.

For information about WNV in Massachusetts, visit the State Department of Public Health website at www.state.ma.us/dph or call 1-866-MASS-WNV.

For more information about WNV in the United States visit the Centers for Disease Control website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

For more information on Altosid, the commercial name for the larvacide to be used in catch basins, visit the Environmental Protection Agency website at www.epa.gov

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Heroin and the Holidays: Know the Risks

by Eileen Brigandi, Associate Director, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Boston Public Health Commission

It's the holiday season, and partygoers want to relax and celebrate, and some will choose to use mood-altering substances both legal – like alcohol -or illegal - like marijuana - in order to unwind. There is also a chance that someone will offer heroin - through a straw, not a needle - to you or someone you love. Young people are especially vulnerable to experimentation. So before you decide to try something harder than eggnog, know the dangers.

It Seems Easy to Try

The heroin available in Boston now is cheaper and easier to try for first-time users. Experimenters think that snorting heroin is safer than injecting; they don't fear HIV/AIDS, or see themselves as junkies. The truth is that no matter how you use it—snort, smoke, or inject—heroin is highly addictive and poses many dangers.

Basic Facts

1. Heroin is highly addictive whether snorted or injected.
2. Snorting heroin often leads to injection use.
3. Heroin is cut with other substances that can also be extremely dangerous, like cocaine, lanocaine, laundry detergent, or bleach.

Regular use of heroin leads to a need for more of the drug to create the same effect. Injection is often the next step. A person becoming addicted will begin to experience painful symptoms of withdrawal when their body is without heroin: nausea, diarrhea, sweats and fever, cold flashes, inability to sleep, kicking movements.

But addiction isn't the only danger. Heroin abuse and needle injection can lead to other serious problems: spontaneous abortion, collapsed veins, and infectious diseases, such as HIV /AIDS and hepatitis.

Talking About Addiction

Addiction is not a moral issue, but a disease that requires treatment. Friends and family members can make a difference by educating themselves about addiction. If you are a parent, talk to your children about the risks of drugs. Signs of addiction include

missing school or work
slurred speech
mood swings
gone for days at a time

sleeping long hours
can't follow a conversation
personal hygiene declines
disappearance of money and household items.

Talk to your loved one when they are not high. State your feelings of concern and your support rather than making accusations or preaching. For example, statements like “I care about you, and I am worried about the changes in your behavior. I will help you get help” are likely to be effective. When you confront someone about using/abusing heroin, this person may become argumentative and deny that there is a problem. Don’t give up. Help is available for heroin users, friends, families, and communities. Look for a new Boston Public Health Commission campaign to prevent heroin use among youth.

Information and Help

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) offers a full range of treatment services and/or referral. You can also call your local community health centers for substance abuse service information.

- BPHC Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (617) 534-5554
- Boston Against Drugs (BAD) (prevention and education) (617) 534-9375
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health Helpline 800-327-5050
- Latino Health Institute 617-350-6900
- Fenway Community Health Center 617-267-0900 (For Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered)
- Al-Anon Family Groups 781-843-5300
- Parental Stress Hotline 800-632-8188

Websites

- Boston ResourceNet <http://www.bostonresourcenet.org>
- MA Department of Public Health <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas/bsas.htm>
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information <http://www.health.org/Index.htm>

Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission and
Mayor Thomas M. Menino
February 2001

It Starts With Your Heart

Now is the time to do something good for your heart. February is National Heart Awareness Month, and March is National Diabetes Awareness Month. Diabetes can lead to heart disease, so it is important to find out if you have diabetes and to care for your health. Many of the same activities will help your heart and help you prevent diabetes or manage your diabetes: eating healthy foods, exercising, and going to the doctor regularly.

It's never too late to start taking good care of your heart. Start small. Any one thing you do will make a difference.

1. Get active. Exercise—even a small amount—can improve your health. Try walking for 15 minutes a day. Walk the dog. Get off the T one stop early and walk to work.
2. Quit smoking. It's never too late to quit or cut back on the number of cigarettes you smoke. Get help from your doctor or www.trytostop, and keep trying until you succeed.
3. Eat more fruits and vegetables. Get a salad with lunch instead of chips or fries. Snack on apples, oranges, grapes.
4. Relax. Stress is a major factor in heart disease. Take time to unwind. Get support.

Know the signs of heart attack and stroke

If you or someone you know has these problems, call "911" for help immediately. Don't just wait and hope it goes away.

Signs of a heart attack include:

- Pain or pressure in the center of the chest that may move to the shoulders, neck, or arms.
- Chest pains with dizziness, fainting, sweating, nausea or trouble breathing.

Signs of a stroke include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body or face.
- Trouble seeing, especially in one eye.
- Sudden problem with speaking, difficulty understanding what people are saying.
- Sudden, painful headaches.
- Dizziness and falling down, along with the other symptoms.

Get tested

When you visit your health care professional, ask for these “numbers.” Talk to your doctor about what they mean.

- Blood cholesterol
- Blood pressure
- Blood sugar

Information and Help

Talk to your doctor or health care professional about your heart health, quitting, smoking, exercise, food, and stress. Look for ideas and activities from the new Healthy Heart Initiative from the Boston Public Health Commission.

- Call the Boston Public Health Commission at (617) 534-5395 for more information on the city's new cardiovascular initiative.
- American Heart Association 1-800-AHA-USA1
- Boston Community Centers (exercise and relaxation) (617) 635-4920
- Boston Parks and Recreation (617) 635-4506

Websites

- Boston ResourceNet www.bostonresourcenet.com
- MA Department of Public Health www.state.ma.us/dph/bsas
- American Heart Association www.americanheart.org
- American Cancer Society www.cancer.org
- Quitting Smoking: MA Department of Public Health www.trytostop.com or Join Together <http://www.quitnet.com>

Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission and
Mayor Thomas M. Menino
May 2001

How to Choose a Mental Health Therapist

By Suzanne Fields, LICSW, Director of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Boston Public Health Commission

One out of every ten children will need mental health treatment of some kind, according to the Report of the U.S. Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health. If you are an adult, this column can answer questions about finding care for the emotional health of the children in your life. And if you are a teenager thinking about getting help, take this opportunity to make the move.

At some point during a child's growing up, he or she may face challenging life situations like family stress or begin to have difficulties with moods, relationships, and problem behavior. Therapy can help a child who is struggling with these problems and prevent more serious trouble later. Don't wait; get help early.

Finding a Good Therapist

A good starting place is to ask people you trust, such as your doctor, clergy, child's teacher, friends and family for referrals to therapists. If you are a high school student, talk to a guidance counselor, nurse or staff at your school-based health center about finding someone to talk to. If you have insurance, call to find out about your mental health coverage. Also ask your insurer how to find a therapist covered by your plan. If you don't have insurance, call the Mayor's HealthLine at (617) 534-5050 for information and assistance enrolling in free or low-cost insurance for children under 19. The Boston Public Health Commission operates school-based health centers in 7 Boston high schools, all of which provide mental health services. Call (617) 534-5198 for more information.

When you are getting referrals, it is good to start with a list of at least 3 possible therapists. Tell the insurance company or agency what is important to you about a therapist: gender, race and ethnicity, language, experience working with children and/or adolescents, and experience with the problems you are dealing with.

Preparing for the First Meeting

When you call the therapist, ask when appointments are available, where to meet, the cost, and if she or he will accept your insurance. Most therapists offer after school times and many mental health agencies provide therapy in school. Check with your child's school about this option.

Depending on the child's age, during the first appointment, the therapist may meet with the parent alone, or spend time with parent and child. Be prepared to describe what you or your child is experiencing and the effect of these problems on you, your family, school, and peer relationships.

Confidentiality

Talking about problems can be uncomfortable. It's normal for you and your child to be embarrassed at first. Remember that therapists must keep whatever you discuss in therapy private unless you permit them to talk to someone like a teacher or pediatrician. Only when a client is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else is the therapist legally required to report information.

However, if you or your child do not feel like you can work with a particular therapist, call another and schedule an appointment. It may be frustrating to "start again" but your comfort is necessary for successful therapy.

More Information

The Mayor's Help Line (for insurance info.) Ph. (617) 534-5050

Boston ResourceNet (info. on local agencies) www.bostonresourcenet.org

BPHC School-based Health Centers Ph. (617) 534-5198

MA Dept. of Mental Health Ph. 617.626.8000

Federation for Children with Special Needs Ph. 1.800.331.0688, www.fcsn.org

Parent Professional Advocacy League Ph. 1.800.537.0446 www.fcsn.org/pal

Mental Help Net www.mentalhelp.net

Children's Mental Health Educational Campaign www.mentalhealth.org/child

National Mental Health Association www.nmha.org

SAMHSA Ph. 1.800.789.2647 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org

Note: Some of the information for this article was obtained from two SAMHSA, Center for Mental Health Services publications: Choosing the Right Mental Health Therapist, and Your Child's Mental Health: What Every Family Should Know. See the SAMHSA website listed above for information on these publications and others.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission and
Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

June 2002

Preventing West Nile Virus & Other Mosquito-borne Illnesses.

By Suzanne Strickland, MPH

Prevention Coordinator, Communicable Disease Control

Boston Public Health Commission

Summer is a time for fun: A time to sit back and enjoy the beach, the back yard and barbecues. But the last few years in the United States, summer has also been a time to think about ways to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses like West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV).

Both viruses, WNV and EEEV, can be transmitted to humans from infected mosquitoes that get these viruses from birds. The risk of WNV infection following a mosquito bite is very low. Most people infected with WNV experience no illness or only mild illness, however a small number of people develop more serious disease, especially the elderly. The risk of serious illness is greater with EEEV, but it is rare to find EEEV in the Boston area.

Mosquitoes are most active between July and September, but if the weather remains warm, the risk period can extend to November.

In order to prevent mosquito bites, consider taking the following steps:

- Use a mosquito repellent. The most effective repellents contain DEET, but there are several alternatives approved by the EPA. Read the directions on the product label for precautions that need to be taken and to find out how often to reapply the repellent. If you use a product containing DEET, avoid using repellents with DEET concentrations above 10% on children, and with concentrations above 35% on adults. Do not let children apply DEET to themselves. Do not apply DEET on infants.
- Wear protective clothing such as a long sleeved shirt, long pants and socks.
- Although mosquitoes can bite at any time of day, try to limit time outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair. This will help prevent mosquitoes from getting inside.

Mosquitoes need water to breed and can develop into adults in a little as a week. In order to keep mosquitoes from breeding, take the following steps:

- Turn over or cover unused flower pots, buckets, garbage cans, and wheelbarrows.
- Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water.
- Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use. Keep swimming pool covers clear of water and debris.
- Cover or dispose of old tires. They are one of mosquitoes' favorite places to breed.

If you find a dead bird in Boston, **call the City's Animal Control Department at 617-635-5348**. Although not all birds will be tested, it is very important that all dead birds are reported. Large numbers of dead birds in an area may be a sign that mosquitoes are carrying disease.

For more information on mosquito-borne illness, contact the Boston Public Health Commission's Information line at **617-534-2652**, or visit our website at www.bphc.org/CDC/westnile.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the
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August 2002

In the wake of violence: Recognize signs of stress & focus on healing.

*By Suzanne Fields, LICSW
Director of Child & Adolescent Mental Health
Boston Public Health Commission*

Turn on the evening news, or pick-up the morning paper and sometimes it's easy to think that violence in our communities only affects "someone else". The truth is that when terrible things happen to people in our neighborhood, it can have a deep impact on us all. Living in a constant state of fear, worry, and anger can have damaging effects and also lead to *traumatic stress*.

Traumatic stress is a response anyone can have when faced with an extraordinary event that threatens a person's feeling of safety. When this response fails to go away, it is commonly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder.

A traumatic event at one level or another impacts everyone. Impact can occur when a person experiences the trauma directly, or when a person witnesses the trauma happening to another. For example, some people, including children, were affected by the constant airing on TV of the collapse of the Twin Towers after the attacks of September 11th.

Just as many people can be impacted by a traumatic event, there is a wide range of responses that can occur. Some people may experience small reactions, and others may experience more. Reactions can occur shortly after an event, but also can occur weeks, even months later. Traumatic stress reactions can change a person's behavior, thoughts, and physical health. The following is a list of some common reactions that can occur in children, adolescents, and adults.

Physical and Behavioral changes

Headaches, stomachaches
Easily startled
Drug and alcohol abuse
Problems at work or school

Emotional changes

Sadness, depression
Irritable, short-tempered, angry
Feeling overwhelmed, disconnected, numb

Changes in thoughts

Not feeling safe

Difficulty concentrating

Lack of motivation

Flashbacks; re-experiencing the event as if it was happening again

There is no specific timeline in which these reactions will go away. They often do get better over time. If you find yourself or your child experiencing difficulties that get in the way of school, work or family life, ask for help. Seek help from family, clergy, or your health care provider.

Key points about traumatic stress:

- Traumatic stress reactions happen to healthy, strong people-it is not a weakness.
- Traumatic stress reactions are normal reaction to an extraordinary event.
- When explaining bad events to children, provide accurate information. Children often have misunderstandings or misinformation that you can correct. Teenagers often pretend that things don't bother them so it is important to reach out to them.
- Talk about your feelings. Connecting with friends, family and spiritual leaders can offer support and help relieve stress.
- Take positive actions to gain a sense of control. Do things that impact positively on your life, the lives of others, and your community.

For more information on coping with traumatic stress, contact the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-2279.



Boston Health Notes

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September 2002

First Lesson of School Year: Pedestrian Safety.

By Kim Wolski, MPH

*Director of the Childhood Injury Prevention Program
Boston Public Health Commission*

As the long days of summer end, and kids from across Boston head back to the classroom, it's a good time for parents to talk to their kids about how to get to and from school safely.

Pedestrian injuries are the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children ages 5 to 14. In fact, nationwide in 2000 an estimated 44,600 children ages 14 and under suffered motor vehicle-related pedestrian injuries. Children ages 5 to 9 are at greatest risk and in many instances parents overestimate their child's pedestrian skills. Showing an independent streak is a natural part of a child's development, and parents often want to support their child's self-reliance. Yet, when it comes to crossing the street very few children under age 10 can deal safely with traffic.

Children have difficulty judging speed, distance of cars and the direction traffic sounds are coming from. Young children often have mistaken beliefs about cars. They think cars can stop instantly, or that if they can see a driver, the driver can see them. In general, children are more distracted and have trouble recognizing and reacting to danger. Parents, caregivers and older peers should be good role models and demonstrate safe street crossing for younger children. Children learn by doing and will follow and older persons example, safe or unsafe.

To help your children stay safe as they walk to the bus stop, or to and from school, follow and teach these safety guidelines:

- ***Teach children to cross the street at a corner or crosswalk.*** Teach them to walk, not run, across intersections. Tell children to listen to adult crossing guards or safety patrols at monitored intersections.
- ***Teach children to recognize and obey all traffic signals and markings.*** A flashing "walk" sign is not an automatic "go" signal. It means a pedestrian has permission to cross, but must first stop and look both ways for cars.
- ***Make sure children look in all directions before crossing the street.*** Teach them to stop at the curb or edge of the road, and to look left, right and left again for traffic before and while crossing the street.

- *Teach children not to enter the street from between parked cars or from behind bushes or shrubs.* Darting into the street accounts for the majority of child pedestrian fatalities.
- *Make sure children always wear footwear and clothing that incorporates retroreflective material.* Retroreflective material makes the material up to 1,500 times brighter than white fabric.
- *Warn children to be extra alert in bad weather.* Visibility might be poor and motorists might not be able to see children or stop quickly.
- *Be a good role model by demonstrating proper pedestrian safety.*

For educational resources or for more information about pedestrian or child safety, call the Boston Public Health Commission Childhood Injury Prevention Program at 617-534-5197.



Boston Health Notes

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October 2002

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

By Joanne Brewer, MPH

*Program Development Coordinator, Domestic Violence Program
Boston Public Health Commission*

This month is Domestic Violence Awareness month. You may ask: Why do we need to be more aware of domestic violence? Because it's very likely that you, one of your friends, family members, co-workers, or neighbors has been hurt by a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend. What used to be thought of as a private family matter is now a crime and a very serious public health issue. The more aware we are about domestic violence, the more we can all play a part in ending it.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is about control, and there are many ways that one person can control, intimidate and hurt someone they are in a relationship with. The control can come in different forms including physical and sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and financial abuse. All of these things can be called "domestic violence".

Who is affected by domestic violence?

A recent study found that one out of three women report that a spouse or boyfriend has physically abused them at some time during their life. Domestic violence affects people of all ages, races, religions, cultures, socioeconomic groups, educational backgrounds, and sexual orientations.

What are the effects of domestic violence?

Domestic violence puts people at higher risk for many mental and physical health problems.

- Sexual violence and assault can lead to STD/HIV infection and unwanted pregnancy.
- Physical violence can cause many types of injuries, from bruises, burns, and black eyes to broken bones, head injuries, and miscarriages.
- Emotional or verbal abuse often occurs in violent and controlling relationships and can be even more harmful than physical abuse. It lowers self-esteem and can lead to alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, and even suicide.
- Financial abuse can cause victims to lose their jobs, be forced into poverty, or even to be homeless.

Where can someone get help?

If you think you are being abused, talk to someone you trust; a friend, parent, health care provider, faith leader, social worker, or co-worker. You can also call **SafeLink**, the Massachusetts domestic violence hotline, 24 hours a day at 1-877-785-2020 to get more information about how to stay safe and to figure out what your options are. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

If you think you may be abusing your partner, there is also help available. Batterer treatment programs can help both men and women who are abusive to learn why they use abuse in their relationships and how to change their behavior to stop hurting those they love.

If your children may have witnessed violence in your family, your health care provider can recommend treatment for them to help them deal with what they have experienced and to learn how not to repeat the violence in their own lives.

For more information on services for victims, batterers or children who have witnessed violence, call the Boston Public Health Commission's Domestic Violence Program 617-534-2687.

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Boston Health Notes
*A monthly column of the
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November 2002

November is Diabetes Awareness Month.

*By Bobbie Drake-Saucer
Program Manager, Elder Health
Boston Public Health Commission*

The holiday season is fast approaching and most Bostonians will take part in festive holiday celebrations -- complete with traditional holiday foods. But for people with diabetes certain food could present problems.

Diabetes is a disease in which your body either does not produce insulin, or it produces some insulin but does not produce enough. Insulin is a body chemical that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily functioning. The cause of diabetes is not known, although both genetics and lifestyle factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play roles.

According to the American Diabetes Association, about 17 million people in the United States have diabetes. An estimated 11.1 million have been diagnosed with diabetes, but unfortunately 5.9 million people are unaware that they have the disease.

There are 3 major types of diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes -- The body fails to make insulin, the substance that “unlocks” the cells of the body, allowing glucose (sugar) to enter and fuel them.

Type 2 diabetes -- The body produces some insulin, but fails to make **enough** insulin.

Gestational diabetes -- Develops during pregnancy, and affects about 4% of all pregnant women.

Many parts of the body can be affected by Diabetes. The disease can damage the heart, eyes, feet and kidneys. In addition, some people are more prone to diabetes than others. The condition is more common in Senior Citizens, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. The condition is also more common in those who are obese.

How do you know if you have diabetes?

Although many people are not aware that they have diabetes, there are some basic warning signs, and a simple blood test by your doctor can tell you for sure if you have diabetes. Here are some things that may signal that you suffer from diabetes:

Excessive Thirst

Frequent urination even through the night

Abnormal or severe weight loss

Always feeling hungry

Blurred vision

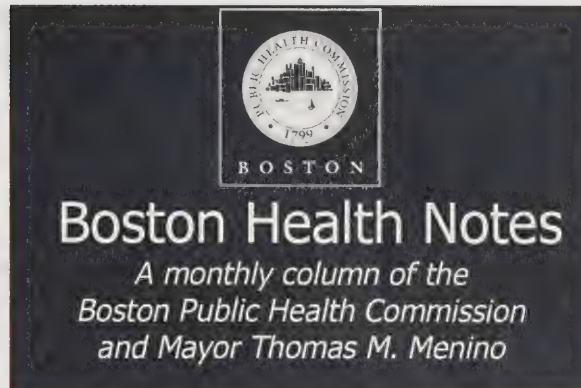
Physically tired, and irritable

Itchy or dry skin

The good news is that diabetes is treatable and you can take steps to reduce your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. People with type 1 diabetes must take insulin. Those with type 2 diabetes may need medication, and can sometimes be treated by changing their diet and losing weight. Practicing good diet and exercise routines are important for those with the disease. You can reduce your chances of developing type 2 diabetes by keeping your weight under control, eating a low fat, high fiber diet, and exercising for 30 minutes 3 times a week.

Diabetes Awareness Event Sponsored by the REACH Boston Elders Program

In observance of Diabetes Awareness Month, the Boston Public Health Commission will hold a diabetes screening and luncheon on **November 14, 2002, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Harriet Tubman House, located at 566 Columbus Ave., in Boston.** If you cannot attend the luncheon, but would like more information, please contact the Boston Public Health Commission, REACH Boston Elders program at (617) 534-5674.



December 2002

Hunger and the Holidays.

*Meredith Sibley RD, LDN, CLC
Coordinator, Boston Nutrition Access Project
Boston Public Health Commission*

Many of us eagerly anticipate the holidays as a time to celebrate with family and friends, sharing good wishes and enjoying festive holiday traditions, music, and meals.

However, not everyone can look forward to the holiday season without being burdened with anxiety and fear about feeding their families, paying their rent, their growing utility bills, and added holiday expenses with limited finances. The current recession has worsened the financial stresses of many people across the nation, including a large number of Boston residents. Inevitably, many people will go hungry during the holiday season, as they are faced with expenses they cannot afford to pay.

Having limited ability to pay for food over a long period can cause nutritional deficiencies, and in the worst cases it can lead to severe malnutrition.

Some families facing this burden are already receiving food assistance programs such as WIC, Food Stamps, and School Breakfast and Lunch, but continue having great difficulty making ends meet. Also, many people do not realize they are eligible for such programs and have yet to apply or don't know how to apply. A recent Boston Globe article noted that Massachusetts ranked 49th out of 50 states for number of eligible residents receiving Food Stamps. Thousands of people in our community aren't taking advantage of help that is available to them.

Whether you are in need of help only during the holiday season, or if you have limited access to food all year, there are resources available to help you. No one should have to go hungry any time, but dealing with hunger during the holidays is especially difficult.

Web Resources:

www.BostonResourceNet.org

You can find a comprehensive list of food and nutrition resources on the website sponsored by the Boston Public Health Commission and Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD).

www.gettingfoodstamps.org

You can find out if your eligible by visiting the website.

If you do not have Internet access, you can call the number below to get more information about the food and nutrition programs in our area.

Project Bread Foodsource Hotline 1-800-645-8333

The hotline can provide referrals to food pantries in your neighborhood, as well as offer other resources, including determining client's eligibility for food stamps.

If you are someone who has enough food but would like to help to better the holiday season for families in need, please consider donating your time, money, or nonperishable foods to these resources:

Greater Boston Food Bank 1-866-foodnow

Project Bread 1-800-645-8333

United Way 1-617-624-8000

Everyone should be able to celebrate with nutritious meals during the holidays!



Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission &
Mayor Thomas M. Menino

School Based Health Centers give students a boost

Health services available on-site help students stay healthy

By Sue Myers, RN, C., PNP, PhD, Associate Director of Clinical Services, School Based Health Center Program, Boston Public Health Commission

In order for children to do well in school, they must be healthy. With that in mind, the Boston Public Health Commission operates several school-based health centers that cater specifically to the needs of children and teens, providing invaluable health services to thousands of students. February is **National School Based Health Center (SBHC) Awareness Month** and people across the country are working to get the word out about the success of these health centers.

Let's celebrate

The growth of school-based health centers in the United States from 100 in 1988 to nearly 1400 centers in 2002, tells a story of a remarkably successful effort to improve access to health care for a traditionally underserved population: school-aged children and adolescents. Today, more than 24,000 students are offered in-school health services across Massachusetts.

Giving students the health care they need

School based health centers are full-service clinics, providing sports physicals, immunizations, diagnosis and treatment of illnesses, mental health services, health and sexuality education, nutrition education, oral health, vision and hearing screening and first aid for minor injuries. Each SBHC is staffed by a variety of health care providers including a nurse practitioner or physician assistant, a mental health professional, nutritionist, health coordinator and dental hygienist. Health center staff work closely with the school to support its educational mission.

Providing a wide range of services

Having a health center at a school allows the staff to develop trusting relationships with students. Students know they can go to the clinic and seek care when they need to. This helps identify problems that might otherwise go unnoticed. One example of this is a student who was being seen with unusual frequency at one SBHC. She had recently been overcome with feelings of distress, anger and anxiety. She had failing grades. After

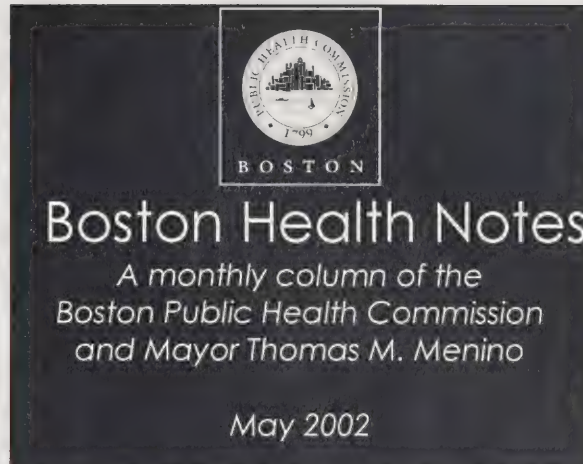
several visits the student confided to her physician assistant that she had been a victim of sexual abuse earlier in her life. After a meeting with the parent, student and mental health counselor, the student agreed to mental health counseling. The SBHC worked with the parents and student to devise a plan that met her schedule and got her the counseling she needed.

In another case, an 11 year old was seen in the SBHC because of wheezing. The nurse practitioner diagnosed a recurrent asthma episode. After two nebulizer treatments it was apparent the child needed more urgent care. The mother was called and the child was seen at the primary care physician. After the child recovered, the nurse practitioner worked with the child and the parent to reinforce preventive education about asthma.

Challenges that lie ahead

With the current short fall of state and local funds in Massachusetts, the future of School Based Health Centers in Boston is uncertain. It is important that parents, legislators, and all Boston residents recognize the high value and quality of SBHCs.

To find out if your child's school has a School Based Health Center, visit <http://www.bphc.org/schoolhealthcenters> or call (617) 534-5198.



How to Reduce Asthma Triggers in Your Home

By Margaret Reid, RN

*Director of the Asthma Prevention & Control Program
Boston Public Health Commission*

Did you know that, nationally, asthma is the most common reason that children miss school? In Boston children ages 5-14 are hospitalized at three times the rate as Massachusetts as a whole. Further, the Boston Youth Survey surveyed 2285 Boston teens, in 2000. One out of seven of these teens reported that they have active, doctor diagnosed asthma. By any measure, asthma is a major health concern for Boston residents.

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways in the lungs -- a disease that can't be cured, but can be controlled. During an asthma episode, the airways become swollen and constricted, making it hard to breathe. Many people with asthma are prescribed medication to help manage their conditions, and to help clear their airways when they have an asthma attack. However, there are things people can do to help minimize those things in the environment which make asthma worse.

Controlling "asthma triggers" is an important part of controlling asthma. Many asthma triggers -- like dust and dust mites, air pollution and tobacco smoke, mold and perfumes are found in our everyday environment. Even pests like cockroaches and mice can be asthma triggers.

Since we spend much of our time at home, that's a good place to reduce the triggers that make asthma worse. By making some small changes, you can reduce exposure to major asthma triggers such as environmental tobacco smoke, and cockroach and mice allergen in the home.

Environmental tobacco smoke or second hand smoke is exhaled by a smoker and breathed in by others and is related to a number of health problems in children, including asthma. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that second hand smoke causes

up to a million asthma episodes of asthma a year and is probably a cause of asthma among children who would not otherwise develop it. To decrease exposure to secondhand smoke, avoid smoking in your home or car and ask others not to smoke. Instead, smoke outside and away from children. Also, make sure your day care provider does not allow smoking inside or around children as well.

Of course the best way to reduce environmental tobacco smoke is for smokers to quit. For those who are ready to quit or cut back on smoking, there are many programs to help. In Massachusetts, **Tobacco-Free Helpline**, at 1-800-879-8678.

Controlling pests in your home is another important way to reduce a significant asthma trigger. **Integrated Pest Management** is a way to reduce pests, like cockroaches and rodents, while using less pesticides and poisons, which can be harmful to health. Pests need many of the same things as people to survive. They need a way in and out of your home, food and water, and a place to sleep and nest. Here are some simple things you can do to control a pest problem at home:

- Have all leaks repaired and all cracks and holes.
- Fill spaces around pipes.
- Keep trash in a covered container and take it out frequently.
- Trash containers outside should be covered as well.
- Dishes can be washed at night instead of in the morning.
- Remove pet food in between meals.
- Finally, pests like dark spaces, so try to have as little clutter as possible. Piles of newspapers and grocery bags are places to nest, so throw away what you are not using. Also, clean away their pest droppings with a wet rag – pests are attracted to their own odor.

The Boston public Health Commission can provide further information on how to reduce asthma triggers in your home through its **Asthma Prevention and Control Program** at (617) 534-5966.



Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission &
Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Food stamps for immigrants – you may qualify!

By Meredith Sibley, Boston Public Health Commission

Did you know that less than half of the people eligible for food stamps actually get them? Don't assume you're not eligible, just because you are working or because you are not a citizen. All types of people receive food stamps, including working couples, single people, families, and seniors! And there have been changes in the law to allow more people to qualify for them. Food stamps can help buy nutritious foods for healthy, well-balanced meals, and prevent many families from going hungry. Using food stamps will also help minimize the burden now falling upon local food pantries and other charities and support local business.

Changes in food stamp benefits for immigrants

There have been some changes in the law recently that might make you eligible for food stamp benefits. As of April 1, 2003, *qualified non-citizens or qualified aliens* (see definition below) may be eligible for food stamp benefits if they have been living in the United States for *5 continuous years* or longer. Also, qualified immigrants no longer have to prove that they are disabled or that they have worked in the US for 40 quarters (about 10 years) in order to receive food stamps. Remember – getting food stamps **does not** affect your application for citizenship! Many people who were eliminated from the program last summer may be able to reapply now.

Who is a qualified non-citizen or alien?

A *qualified non-citizen or alien* is someone who is not a citizen, but is in one of the following categories at the time that the person applies for food stamp benefits: Legal permanent resident (green card holders), refugees, asylees, noncitizens whose deportation or removal is withheld, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians, parolees who have had the status for at least one year, conditional entrants who were granted before 4/1/1980, and battered non-citizens.

How it works and how to apply

The Food Stamp Program helps people pay for groceries. People in the program get a card that can be used at grocery stores to buy food. How much you get in food stamps depends on your income, family size, household expenses and assets. Your home and car

are **not** considered assets.

To apply or get information about food stamp benefits, call the Application Assistance Unit at 1-800-249-2007 or go to your local DTA office. You can apply in person, by mail, or you can fax in your application. You can also call the Food Source Hotline at 1-800-645-8333 for assistance. To print out an application, get advice on applying, and find out if you qualify for food stamps go to Project Bread's food stamp website:

www.gettingfoodstamps.org

More Changes Coming:

Coming this October, immigrant children who meet the immigrant status requirements will be eligible for food stamps regardless of when they came to the US.



Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission &
Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Prescription Advantage: Open Enrollment for a Limited Time

By Trinieste Polk, Program Director, Mayor's Health Line, Boston Public Health Commission

With the cost of prescriptions rising, some Boston residents have to choose to pay for food and rent over paying for much needed medications. This is especially true for seniors and the disabled who often need many kinds of medications. Prescription Advantage – the nation's first drug insurance plan – may give you relief to high pharmacy costs and fill the gap left by Medicare.

Open enrollment for Prescription Advantage is now available, but for a limited time. **You can enroll in Prescription Advantage between August 1 and August 31, 2003.** Don't wait because after August 31, enrollment will be closed again.

What is Prescription Advantage?

Prescription Advantage is a drug insurance plan that can save money on prescription drugs. It is administered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Unlike other plans, Prescription Advantage provides financial security with a limit on annual out-of-pocket spending. Once the amount you have paid in deductible and co-payments reaches your annual out-of-pocket spending limit, Prescription Advantage will cover all of your drug costs for the remainder of the plan year—you only need to continue paying your monthly premium.

When is open enrollment?

Open enrollment is for the month of August only and applications must be received by August 31. Coverage will begin October 1, 2003.

[Please note: All applications must be received by the Plan by August 31. However, August 31 is a Sunday so it is best to have your application in by Friday, August 29 to be sure you meet the deadline.]

Who is eligible?

You are eligible if you are a Massachusetts resident who is not receiving prescription drug benefits under Medicaid AND are:

- age 65 or older; or
- under age 65, work 40 or fewer hours per month, meet Commonwealth disability guidelines and have gross annual household incomes at or below 188% of the Federal Poverty Level.

How much will I have to pay for my prescriptions?

Members of Prescription Advantage pay a premium and co-payments. There is also a deductible associated with the plan. What you pay depends on your annual income. The ranges are listed below.

- **Premium** – a monthly charge assessed to all members. The range is \$0 to \$99 per month depending on income.
- **Deductibles** – the amount of money a member pays before the benefit takes effect. The range is \$0 to \$125 per quarter depending on income.
- **Co-payments** – the payment made for each prescription filled. For Level 1 Prescriptions (Generic brands) the range is \$9 to \$12 per prescription, for Level 2 (Brand names) \$23 - \$45 per prescription and Level 3 (Other Brand Names) \$45-\$50. Ninety (90) day mail service prescriptions are less expensive.

Where can I get an application and find out more information?

Prescription Advantage applications can be obtained through local Councils on Aging, SHINE offices, by going to the Plan's website at www.800ageinfo.com, or by contacting the Plan directly at 1-800-AGE-INFO (1-800-243-4636) or TTY 1-877-610-0241.

For assistance in languages other than English call the Boston Public Health Commission, Mayor's Health Line (MHL) – (800) 847-0710 or (617) 534-5050.



Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Ready to learn: By controlling asthma, your child will feel better and do better at school

by Margaret Reid, Director, Asthma Program, Boston Public Health Commission

Having asthma can be a problem for many kids during the school day. Not only is it the leading cause of school absence, but students with asthma often come to school tired or have asthma symptoms at school that make learning difficult.

"No one should lose sleep over asthma," says Margaret Reid, RN, director of the Boston Public Health Commission's Asthma Program. "By working with the school nurse and the child's doctor, parents will see a real difference in how many asthma symptoms their child has."

Parents, school nurses and the child's doctor all need to work together to ensure that asthma is not a barrier to success at school. This means sharing information and being in regular contact with each other. This three-way communication will have a positive effect on your child's health.

Give your school nurse information about your child's asthma. It sounds simple, but the school nurse can do a much better job of helping your child if he or she has the most current medical information. For instance, make sure you give the school nurse:

- The medication your child takes during the school day;
- Written permission to administer medication;
- Name and phone number of your child's doctor or nurse;
- Required school forms including physicals, health cards, emergency contact information;
- Updated Asthma Action Plan;
- Signed consent allowing your doctor and school nurse to share information about your child's health;
- List of your child's allergies and asthma triggers.

Talk to your child's doctor regularly about your child's asthma. It is important that your physician know if your child is losing sleep, sitting out activities, missing school or using his/her rescue inhaler on a regular basis. These may be signs of poorly controlled asthma. Some questions to ask your doctor are:

- Does my child need a second rescue inhaler to keep at school?
- Does my child need a peak flow meter or spacer to use at school?
- Can I get an updated Asthma Action Plan and medication orders for the school?
- Should my child get a flu shot?

Also, make sure the doctor has contact information for the school nurse as well as your signed consent to share information about your child's health condition with the school nurse.

Supporting Boston school nurses. Because 11% of Boston middle and elementary students have asthma, school nurses face this issue every day. The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) has sent "Asthma Counts at School" kits to every Boston school nurse. These kits contain asthma supplies (such as peak flow meters, spacers and blank Asthma Action Plans) as well as a list of community resources, educational games, videos, and materials. The BPHC also runs programs for kid with asthma. For more information call (617) 534-5966 or visit www.bphc.org/asthma.



Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino

8 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE FOR AN EMERGENCY

By Shirma Pierre, Project Manager, Office of Public Health Preparedness, Boston Public Health Commission

Most people tend to think of an emergency situation as a large event involving many casualties, such as September 11, 2001. However, an emergency does not have to be large or manmade to affect you, and your family. For instance, there could be a lost of power to the city, like the one that affected the Northeast from New York City to Detroit in August 2003. Even closer to home, were the Roslindale floods of 1996 and 1998 where several inches of rain caused untreated raw sewage, home heating oil from busted tanks, diesel fuel and other toxic household chemicals to flood the streets. In fact, it is possible that an emergency situation may arise that affects only you and your family- as in the case of a fire. Regardless of the size or nature of an emergency, there are simple things that you and your family can do to be prepared. If you have not yet done so, then this may be a good time to begin planning for an emergency.

Nothing ever happens here ...

One of the main reasons why people fail to have an emergency plan for themselves and their families is the belief that "nothing ever happens here." On the other hand, there are those who believe that if a disaster does occur, there is nothing they can do. While there is very little you can do to prevent a disaster from happening, there are steps that you can take to be prepared when it does.

Basic Steps to Prepare for an Emergency

1. Make a supply kit that includes items like first aid kits, flashlights, batteries, food and bottled water.
2. Pick two meeting places: one right outside your home and one outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home.
3. Give your home a safety inspection. Ensure that there are safety devices like smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and carbon monoxide detectors.
4. Create a communication plan by choosing someone out of state as your family contact, whom everyone can call and tell where they are in an emergency.
5. Find out what your school's emergency plan is ahead of time.
6. Take a CPR or basic first aid class. This is available at the Boston Red Cross and most hospitals in the city. Taking a basic first aid class may better prepare you to assist your family and neighbors in the event of an emergency.
7. Stay informed.
8. Keep a list of important phone numbers.

Information and Help

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) has emergency planning guides, and brochures available to the public that provide more information on emergency preparedness. You can request copies of these materials by calling the BPHC Public Health Preparedness Office at 617-534-2333. Further information can also be found at these websites:

Boston Public Health Commission	www.bphc.org/prepare
American Red Cross	www.redcross.org/services/disaster
Massachusetts Department of Public Health	www.mass.gov/dph
U.S. Department of Homeland Security	www.ready.gov

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Boston Health Notes

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& Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Public Health is Here For You

By John Auerbach, Executive Director, Boston Public Health Commission

A good Swiss Army Knife is one piece of equipment that contains a lot of useful tools that help make life a little easier; tools that can help you in an emergency, or prevent an accident from happening. The Boston Public Health Commission is one organization that has many different programs that protect you and your community. The best part is, that unlike the Swiss Army knife, you don't have to carry the Commission around; its programs are all around you, in your neighborhood, ready when you need them. Here is just a small sample of how the Commission provides the tools for prevention and education in your community:

Childhood Injury Prevention Program

The Commission's Childhood Injury Prevention Program offers many services. For example, falls are the leading cause of unintentional injury for children. Window falls can cause serious injury, yet they can be prevented. CIPP helps parents protect their children from window falls by offering discounted window guards residents can purchase at the Boston Building Materials Coop (617) 442-2262. Wearing a helmet when you ride a bike or moped can reduce the risk of injury in a crash by 85 percent. Thanks to CIPP Boston residents can take advantage of \$5.00 bike helmets available for all ages (children and adults) at Boston Medical Center's gift shop. The CIPP also offers technical assistance on proper car seat installation and child passenger safety, as well as free workshops on how to child proof your home. For more information, call (617) 534-5197.

Public Health Van

Are you a neighborhood group or organization planning a special event? How about arranging a visit of *The Health Connection*, the Commission's Public Health Van. Free services include: 8 different types of health screenings including screenings for cancer, diabetes, and cholesterol! In some instances, the van can provide on-site dental and eye screenings. Plus, there is free health information on everything from asthma and family planning to injury prevention. Are you uninsured or looking for health insurance of nutritional help? By special arrangement *The Health Connection* can help you enroll in Mass Health, Children's Medical Security plan and WIC.

For more information, or to find out when the van is coming to your neighborhood, call 617-534-2295 or email healthvan@bphc.org.

Support for Pregnant Women and their Families

Healthy Baby/Healthy Child is a free, *confidential* multi-language program offered by the Boston Public Health Commission to any pregnant Boston resident with a child from birth to three years old. During and after your pregnancy, public health nurses, social workers and advocates will come to your home and provide health education on subjects such as:

- Stages of pregnancy
- Signs of early labor and what to do
- Nutrition and,
- Infant and women's health.

Health Baby/Healthy Child also offers help with substance abuse, violence prevention, fuel assistance, immigration assistance and job training. Healthy Baby/Healthy Child even offers programs for fathers and much, much more.

For more information contact Healthy Baby/Healthy Child at 617-534-5832.

The Boston Public Health Commission is the city's health department and its mission is to protect, promote and preserve the health and well being of all Boston residents, particularly the most vulnerable. Many of the services and educational materials we offer are free. It's *your* commission and there is more to it than you can imagine. Whether we are overseeing the paramedics that respond to you in an emergency, working in your neighborhood to protect your health or developing plans to protect you in a disaster, the Boston Public Health Commission is here for you. If funding for public health were taken away—what would you be missing?

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Boston Health Notes

A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino

May 2004

When it comes to exercise, try the “buddy system”

By Anne McHugh, Director, Boston Public Health Commission's STEPS Project

Having trouble sticking to an exercise routine? Maybe the answer is to bring a friend along.

Studies show that you're more likely to stick with an exercise routine if others are counting on you to be there. It's easy to skip a workout when you exercise alone – after all who's going to notice? But exercising with a friend will help you stick to your routine. Not only will you not want to disappoint that person, you'll actually enjoy exercising more.

When looking for an exercise buddy, find someone who likes the same kind of physical activity and who is available at times that work for you. And try to find someone with similar goals. For instance, maybe you're both training for a race or want to walk 3 times a week. Having similar expectations will help you support each other in reaching those goals.

You can get health benefits just by adding small amounts of physical activity in your daily routine. Over time, aim to build up to 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. Walking at a brisk pace is a great form of exercise that most people can do.

Want to join a walking club? If you live in Boston, there may be a walking club in your neighborhood. Mayor Thomas M. Menino and the Boston Public Health Commission just launched NeighborWalk - a program where more than 50 walking clubs are being formed across Boston. If you live in Chinatown, Dorchester, Hyde Park, Jamaica Plain, Mattapan, Roxbury, South Boston or the South End, call (617) 534-5690 or visit www.bphc.org. Many of these walking groups are also offering health education related to nutrition, diabetes or asthma. There are many other opportunities to do community walks as part of sponsored events and fundraisers. Check the Commission's website for a list of some of these events happening this spring and summer.

NeighborWalk is a program of Boston STEPS and is funded in part by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and the US Centers for Disease Control.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

June 2004

Elder Oral Health Tips

by Meghan Turnier, Program Manager, Oral Health Equity Project, Boston Public Health Commission

As we get older, taking care of our oral health can become more complicated. Dentures, dry mouth and a higher risk for oral cancers are some of the concerns that face the elderly. These oral health issues often come with an increase in cost and limited dental coverage by health insurance companies. The Boston Public Health Commission's Oral Health Equity Project works to increase access to preventive services and dental care for elders in the City of Boston. The Equity Project provides on-site screening at elderly housing developments and senior centers, and connects seniors with low-cost dental care, even if they do not have insurance.

The Boston Public Health Commission has information for elders on denture care, oral cancer, dry mouth and fluoride. These materials are available in English, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. To request this information, please call the Oral Health Equity Project at 617-534-5683.

Basic Facts:

- **Oral Cancer:** if you are over 45 years old, you are at greater risk of developing oral cancer. Oral cancer is usually painless, so it is important to have your mouth checked by your dentist every year. **Risk Factors** include smoking cigarettes, chewing tobacco and drinking alcohol regularly.
- **Dry Mouth:** occurs when there is not enough saliva to keep your mouth wet. Dry mouth can cause difficulty in tasting, chewing, swallowing or speaking, can cause a sticky or burning feeling in the mouth and throat, mouth sores, bad breath and uncomfortable or badly fitting dentures. **Risk Factors** include blood pressure medication, anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications, and lifestyle. **Talk to your dentist if you experience dry mouth.**

Oral health 2/2

Quick Tips: Keeping Your Mouth Healthy

It is important to keep your mouth clean and healthy at every age. Here are some things that you can do to make sure your mouth stays as healthy as you are.

- ❖ **Brushing:** brushing your teeth can clean most of the areas of your mouth. Use a toothbrush with soft (not firm) bristles and a comfortable handle. Remember to brush the biting, front and back surfaces of your teeth. Use light pressure. When you are finished, brush your tongue.
- ❖ **Flossing:** flossing can help you clean between your teeth and remove bacteria (germs) and food where the toothbrush cannot reach. Floss every day. Use gentle motions, and if you need help flossing, ask your dentist to show you how to floss.
- ❖ **Dentures:** if you have dentures, take care of them by keeping them clean. Rinse your mouth with warm water or a water-based rinse before soaking your dentures. While they are soaking, brush your tongue, gums and palate with a soft bristled brush. See your dentist at least once a year to make sure your dentures are still fitting well.
- ❖ **Fluoride:** fluoride can protect you from cavities, tooth sensitivity and your roots. You may need extra fluoride; if you do, your dentist can provide a fluoride treatment for you.
- ❖ **Eating healthy:** we all know that eating a healthy diet is important to your health. Eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables, and low in sugary snacks and soda is also good for your teeth. Snack on foods that do not cause cavities, such as fruit, popcorn, nuts, cheese, and vegetables. Drink plenty of water.
- ❖ **See your dentist every year.**

When we think about oral health, we usually just think about brushing our teeth. It is important to realize that oral health is more than just about teeth! Having a healthy mouth means taking care of your gums, palate, cheek tissues and tongue. It is never too late to improve or change our habits. Each time we do something to take better care of our mouths, our overall health can improve.

Information and Help

BPHC, Oral Health Equity Project

Commission on the Affairs of the Elderly at Boston City Hall

Smokers Quit Line

(617) 534 – 5683

(617) 635 – 4366

1-800-TRY-TO-STOP

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4. The fourth part of the document discusses the implications of the findings. It suggests that the results have significant implications for the understanding of the underlying processes and mechanisms involved in the system.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes the study. It summarizes the key findings and provides a final statement on the importance of the research. It also includes a list of references and a list of figures.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

July 2004

Hand washing your first line of defense against Hepatitis A

By Anita Barry, MD, MPH, Director of Communicable Disease Control, Boston Public Health Commission

As you hear news reports of food preparers in restaurants becoming sick with Hepatitis A, it should serve as a reminder to us all that the simplest and best first line of defense against becoming sick is keeping your hands clean.

What is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a contagious disease that causes swelling of the liver. Classic symptoms of Hepatitis A are fever, fatigue and loss of appetite, nausea and jaundice. People with other liver problems are at risk for more severe disease. There is no treatment for the disease. In most people, once they get sick, the disease goes away on its own.

How is Hepatitis A spread?

The virus is usually spread when individuals do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing a diaper or soiled sheets, then touch their own mouths or prepare food for others. It can be spread by contaminated food (such as uncooked shellfish) or water. The time of highest risk of giving the disease to others is two weeks before you ever start to feel sick. It is important to remember that Hepatitis A is not typically transmitted by blood, semen or saliva. It is transmitted by eating the organism, which is usually passed along by contaminated hands. It can also be transmitted in other ways by means of getting the virus in one's mouth. For example, sex practices where there is oral-anal genital contact can be a means of spreading hepatitis A.

Why is it important to seek treatment if you think you have been exposed?

It can take anywhere from 15 to 50 days to get sick after being exposed during which you can unknowingly pass the infection along to others. Hepatitis A with all its symptoms and stress to your liver can make you feel pretty miserable for about a month or more. If you have been exposed, an inoculation of Immune Globulin (IG) injected in the buttocks

within 14 days of exposure can lessen the severity of the disease or prevent you from getting sick at all. After that there is no treatment available. That is why local public health officials set up clinics immediately after receiving confirmation of food handlers who worked preparing certain types of food when infectious with Hepatitis A.

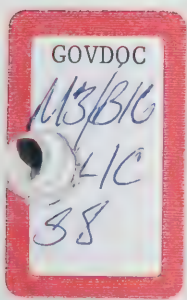
There is a Hepatitis A Vaccine that provides long-term immunity from the disease but it only works if you receive the vaccination BEFORE you have been exposed. People who are interested in getting a vaccine should talk to their healthcare provider. In most cases people would only need a vaccine if they are at a higher risk by:

- Having chronic liver disease
- Are planning to travel or work in a country with high rates of Hepatitis A.
- Have a bleeding disorder and get clotting factors
- Use street drugs or,
- Are a man who has sex with other men

Cooked shellfish versus raw should be your first choice if you are unsure of where the shellfish came from. Wash your hands after changing a diaper or after you use the bathroom; always wash before you eat and you will help protect yourself against Hepatitis A and other diseases as well.

Fact sheets on Hepatitis A and Immune Globulin are available in multiple languages at www.bphc.org.

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

August 2004

Protect your children against lead dust during home renovations

*Nikysha Harding, MPH, Education Coordinator, Boston Public Health Commission's
Boston Childhood Lead Poisoning and Prevention Program*

More children are lead poisoned by home renovations than you'd think; in some areas of the state, 1/3 of lead poisoning cases are caused by renovations in homes built before 1978. In Boston, 67% of the housing was built before 1978 and is at risk of containing lead hazards. Many "do-it-yourselfers" are surprised to learn that home improvements such as replacing windows or other activities that disturb old paint could cause lead poisoning in the children who live there.

During renovations, whenever old paint is disturbed, a fine lead dust settles on floors, carpets, windowsills or other home surfaces. Precautions must be taken to minimize the release of lead dust in the air. Children can inhale the dust or become poisoned through their normal behavior of putting their own hands or toys that have picked up lead dust into their mouths. Even the smallest amounts of lead can cause learning and behavioral problems. In young children, lead poisoning can lead to brain damage or injury to the kidneys, blood or nervous system.

When you renovate yourself here are just a few things to consider:

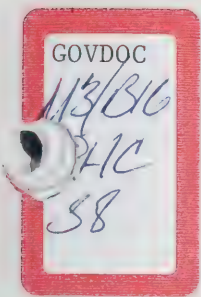
- Work on one room at a time using methods that create the least amount of dust.
- Buy or rent a HEPA vacuum.
- If there are children under six years of age in the home, have them leave the home for the day during renovation activities.
- Cover your face with a mask that is made for lead paint removal (available at your local hardware store) since paper masks offer no protection against lead dust.
- Use 6 mil plastic to close off the work area and remove all furniture, appliances drapes, children's toys, clothing, and personal items from the room.
- Use 6 mil plastic to cover heating ducts, vents and grates and turn off forced air heating or air conditioning in the room you are working on.
- Wet surfaces before hand scraping or sanding to minimize dust
- During exterior renovations, cover vegetable gardens with 6 mil plastic to prevent lead from getting into soil; cover sandboxes, play equipment and outdoor

furniture. The 6 mil plastic should extend out to 8-10 feet from the foundation of the house to prevent paint chips or lead dust from contaminating the yard.

- Purchase tri-sodium phosphate (TSP) at your local hardware store and use it to wash all surfaces during clean-up.

The Boston Public Health Commission's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (BCLPPP) is collaborating with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to provide statewide education about lead poisoning, with a focus on educating homeowners about the serious health hazards of lead exposure during home renovation. Since 2000, the Boston Public Health Commission has been providing free Moderate Risk Deleading Training workshops for Boston homeowners. For a schedule of classes or more information regarding lead poisoning prevention or for other tips on renovating your home safely, call (617) 534-5966 or visit www.bphc.org

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Boston Health Notes

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& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

September 2004

Helping children heal after trauma

Paula Georges, PhD, Director of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Boston Public Health Commission

Trauma occurs when a painful event causes lasting effects that go beyond ordinary grief and sadness. Children can be especially confused and frightened by unexpected events such as a neighborhood shooting, an accidental death of a friend in a car accident or the death of a pet. A violent event can cause as much pain to a child who is indirectly involved as much as it causes a child who is directly involved. Sometimes we think children are not aware, but they usually see and hear more than we think they do.

Some children show signs of trauma right away. For others it may take weeks or months for a child react. Trauma affects every child differently but common signs are:

- Sleep troubles, nightmares, fear of falling asleep
- Changes in appetite
- Feeling tired and irritable
- Having trouble concentrating
- Feeling “clingy” or needing to have loved ones nearby all the time
- Feeling “numb” or having no feelings at all
- Bedwetting, stomach aches or headaches
- Having “flashbacks,” replaying events in their minds, through drawing pictures or acting out the event when playing.
- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- Asking a lot of questions about the event or,
- Not wanting to talk about the event at all.

How to help your child heal:

- LISTEN carefully to a child’s worries and reassure your child that you are doing everything you can to keep them safe.

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trauma p/2

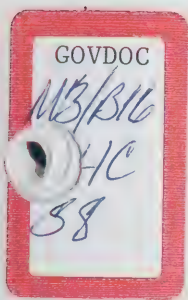
- REMIND your child how much you love him or her, and provide comfort with hugs and close physical contact.
- MAINTAIN your usual routines and schedules. Structure makes a child feel safe and cared for.
- MAKE SURE your child eats well and gets enough sleep and exercise.
- TALK to your child's doctor or counselor to let them know what happened because they can provide additional support. Also, talking with other adults or professionals can help you take care of yourself as you deal with your child's distress. If as a parent you need to "vent" your fear about what's happening, find another adult or professional to talk with. Just remember to guard against your child hearing your distress as this will only make them more anxious.
- REMEMBER you and your child don't have to "go it alone." There are many mental health resources available in the city of Boston. Ask your doctor for a referral. You can also call the Mayor's Health Line 617-534-5050 for help finding a doctor.

For more information

Mayor Thomas M. Menino and the Boston Public Health Commission have just published a new brochure called *Healing/Trauma: How to deal with the bad things that happen to you, your family and your community*. For a free copy, please contact the Boston Public Health Commission at (617) 534-2606 or email

communication@bphc.org. For more information on mental health issues online go to www.talklisten.org or in Spanish, www.hablaescucha.org.

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

October 2004

Slowing down on soft drinks a good first step towards a healthier body

Kathy Cunningham, MEd, RD, LD., Boston Public Health Commission

Now that the city of Boston has removed soft drinks (sodas), sugary fruit and sports drinks from the Boston Public Schools, it's a good time to remind parents of why to cut down on those drinks at home as well.

Both kids and adults today drink more sugary drinks than ever before. Surveys of high school students show that US teenagers have more than doubled their intake of soft drinks from the 1970s to the 1990s.

What's wrong with sugary drinks?

For starters, more and more research shows that constant drinking of sugar-sweetened drinks may contribute to *being overweight or obese which can lead to a host of other health problems*. The more sugar a drink has, the more calories it has. Those calories add up quickly. For instance, if you drink just one can of soda every day for a week, you are consuming more than 1000 calories with no vitamins or fiber! If you don't burn that off, in a month you'll have gained a pound (in a year you'll gain 12 pounds!)

In addition to the risk associated with gaining weight, new studies suggest that having too much of these drinks may also increase the risk of *Type 2 diabetes* in adults and children. It can be confusing to try and sort out all the research about diabetes and why it's increasing. One reason for the increase is that there are more overweight people. But new research now says that people who drink a can of soda day – even if they are not overweight – have a greater chance of getting Type 2 diabetes.

Preventing obesity and type 2 diabetes are good reasons for reducing your sugar intake.
| But how do you know how much sugar you're actually drinking?

Not just sugar - look to the label

Fructose, dextrose, sucrose, invert sugar, and maltose are some of the other names for “sugar” you might find listed as ingredients on a beverage or food label. Sweeteners also include names such as high fructose corn syrup, malt syrup, honey, brown sugar, glucose, and corn sweetener. Ingredients are listed on labels in the order of how much the food product contains of them. So if you see any of the various names for sugar sweeteners listed as the first or second ingredient – and it’s common that there may be more than one listed in the same beverage or food -- watch that you don’t consume too much.

How to reduce your sugar intake

Making small, long-term changes in daily eating habits is an effective way to reduce calorie intake and begin to sustain a healthy weight. Here are some ideas for low-sugar and low-calorie drinks that taste just as good – or better – than sugar drinks:

- Instead of soft drinks or fruit punch, select water most of the time. Water will quench thirst without increased calories. Try flavoring your water with lemon or lime.
- Flavored or sparkling waters are a lower calorie choice when you want to slow down on sweetened beverages.
- Limit the number of sweetened beverages you offer to children. When eating out, ask for low-fat milk or water instead of the soda normally offered with the children’s meals.
- Make sure to read the label for fruit drinks. You might think you’re giving your child nutritious juice, when many can have as much extra sugar as soda. 100% fruit juice, which contains natural sugars, can be a good choice as long as it’s in moderation. One 6-ounce glass of 100% fruit juice per day is enough to provide nutrients for healthy growth. (Over-consumption of juice can also contribute to increased weight.)

Remember, sugar isn’t bad for you – your body needs it for energy. The problem is having too much of it. Read your labels, begin to cut down on sugar sweetened drinks and you’ll have taken an important first step to a healthier lifestyle.



Boston Health Notes

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November 2004

Be A Quitter!

Margaret Reid, RN, Director of Asthma and Diabetes Prevention and Control Program
Boston Public Health Commission

Did you know that you can help protect yourself from Diabetes? Eating right, exercising, and quitting smoking are all things you can do to take care of your health. This month is Diabetes Awareness Month and November 18th is the Great American Smoke Out! Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health, and is especially important to quit if you have diabetes.

According to the American Diabetes Association:

- People with diabetes who smoke are three times as likely to die of cardiovascular disease as are other people with diabetes.
- Smoking raises your blood sugar level, making it harder to control your diabetes.
- Smokers with diabetes are more likely to get nerve damage and kidney disease

Smoking greatly increases the risks of complications from diabetes, including stroke, death, heart failure, amputation and loss of eye sight. Quitting smoking can lower cholesterol, blood pressure and the risk of cardiovascular disease and reduces the risk of these serious complications of diabetes.

Diabetes is a disease that affects the body's ability to break down sugar, starch, and other foods into energy. Diabetes can run in families, and people who are overweight are at risk for developing diabetes. There are two types of diabetes; Type 1 and Type 2. Type 2 diabetes is the most common.

In Massachusetts, 5.3% of adults report they are diagnosed with diabetes, but for Black and Hispanic residents it is closer to 9%. Latinos, American Indians, Asian American and Pacific Islander Americans also have higher rates of diabetes.

According to the 2001 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, about 5.9% of Boston respondents report having diabetes. For Black Boston residents that number was

much higher – 12.7%. About 17% of Boston residents with Diabetes also reported being smokers, but for Black Boston residents with diabetes that number was 22%.

Quitting smoking is an excellent way to help control your diabetes.

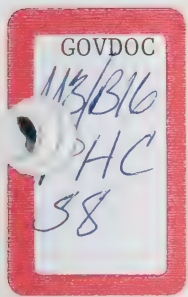
Quitting smoking is hard. It usually takes more than one try. November is a great time to choose a quit date, identify a tobacco treatment program for counseling, and speak with your doctor about nicotine replacement therapy or other medications that may help you be a successful quitter.

Here are some tips to help you quit:

- Set a quit date and stop completely on that day
- Avoid smoke filled locations
- Exercise more to decrease cravings
- Have a plan on what you will do instead of having a cigarette during “risky times” when you smoke out of habit. Try chewing gum when on the phone or having a walk instead of a smoke after dinner
- Clean everything that smells of smoke, like clothes and furniture and your car
- Put your cigarette money in a jar and watch it grow.
- Tell everyone you know you are quitting and ask for their support
- If you fail, try again

Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your health, your diet, or you want to quit smoking. If you need help finding a doctor or need health insurance, call the Mayor’s Health Line at 617-534-5050. We have many resources available at the BPHC website: www.bphc.org. Get help finding a doctor, find quit smoking resources, and access free exercise and walking groups in your area. If you are ready to quit smoking, call the Massachusetts Smokers Quitline at 1-800-TRY-TO-STOP. They can provide telephone counseling or a referral to a program in your neighborhood.

For more information about Diabetes Prevention, call the Boston Public Health Commission’s Asthma and Diabetes Prevention program at (617) 534-5966.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

December, 2004

Promoting Healthy Behavior in Men

By Courtney Grey, Men's Health Program Manager, Boston Public Health Commission

Men have been raised to ignore pain, show strength, and downplay their weaknesses. Society expects them to be in control and provide for their families at all costs. So, they tend to overlook symptoms of illness and injury, and avoid routine health care such as checkups and screenings.

Unfortunately, this contributes to more illness and death. Life expectancy for men is 5 years less than for women (79.8 years vs. 74.4 years). Men also die at higher rates than women for the leading causes of death such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, suicide, and diabetes. The health of Black and Latino men is worse compared to the white men. Furthermore, 14.3 percent of Boston men were uninsured in the year 2002.

Health programs for men

It is difficult to convince men to take advantage of programs that help improve this situation. They are often not comfortable asking for help while feeling weak and vulnerable. There are also many barriers to care such as poverty, poor education, violence, untreated trauma, lack of insurance and lack of access to proper medical facilities. When they do choose to see a doctor, many men do not know where to go or how to get the proper support.

All men should see their doctor on a regular basis and below are a list of clinics specifically designed to meet the needs of men:

Boston Medical Center

617-414-5951

Team # 3 – Wednesdays, 2PM-4PM

Team # 1 – Fridays, 12PM – 5PM

Children's Hospital Young Fathers Program

617-355-7718

Tuesdays, 11AM-6PM

Wednesdays, 12 PM- 5PM

Thursdays, 11 AM-6PM

Whittier Street Health Center

617-989-3028

Thursdays, 4PM-8PM



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In addition, the Boston Public Health Commission is doing a lot to promote healthy behavior in men. Since urban males are so hard to reach it offers programs that meet clients in the community. Barbershops and other non-traditional venues such as courthouses, and car repair shops offer new opportunities to promote healthy male behavior. For example, men may not go to the doctor often but a lot of them visit their barbers on a weekly basis. Men's Health outreach workers do health promotion in barbershops, spending hours with men talking about healthy behaviors and available health services. There are over 70 barbers within a 2 mile radius of the Boston Public Health Commission. They average 50 patrons each week which is over 3,500 men that can be reached!

The Father Friendly Initiative helps men overcome barriers to good, healthy behavior. Father Friendly's Counselors and case managers help their clients with health insurance, fathering, substance abuse, mental wellness, employment and other issues that make it difficult to lead a healthy life. Father Friendly's doors are open free of charge to all men. For more information on the initiative call 617-534-9525.

Another program the Boston Public Health Commission offers men is the HealthCREW, which trains young men between the ages 18 and 25 to do outreach, promotion, and education on health topics in schools and the community. CREW members promote healthy behavior to their peers and are able to translate information on safe sex, sexual harassment, domestic violence, diabetes, and cancer into language young men will understand. Call 617-534-5196 for more information about this program.

Here are things men in Boston can do to take care of themselves:

- First of all, visit your doctor or health center regularly.
- If you don't have a doctor, visit a men's health clinic.
- Make sure you have health coverage.
- If you don't have coverage, call the Mayor's Health line at 617-534-5050 to see if you qualify for MassHealth or other health care assistance.
- Talk to friends and family you trust about things that are bothering you.

For more information about Men's Health, call the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-2662. The health of men affects the lives of all the people around them – their significant others, children, friends, and their communities. We should all promote healthy male behaviors, and help men receive the care they deserve.

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The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also mentions the scope of the study and the limitations. The second part of the paper discusses the methodology used in the study. It mentions the data sources and the statistical methods used. The third part of the paper discusses the results of the study. It mentions the findings and the conclusions. The fourth part of the paper discusses the implications of the study. It mentions the policy implications and the future research. The fifth part of the paper discusses the conclusion. It mentions the main findings and the recommendations.

The study was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner. The data was collected from a representative sample of the population. The statistical methods used were appropriate for the data and the research objectives. The results of the study are presented in a clear and concise manner. The findings are discussed in detail and the implications are highlighted. The study contributes to the existing knowledge in the field and provides valuable insights for policy makers and researchers.

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Boston HealthNotes

July 2005

Preventing West Nile Virus & Other Mosquito-borne Illness

Summer is a time for fun: A time to sit back and enjoy the beach, the back yard and barbecues. However, in the United States, the last few summers have also been a time to think about ways to prevent mosquito-borne illnesses like West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV).

Both viruses, WNV and EEEV, can be transmitted to humans from infected mosquitoes that get these viruses from birds. The risk of WNV infection following a mosquito bite is very low. Most people infected with WNV experience no illness or only mild illness, however a small number of people develop more serious disease, especially the elderly. The risk of serious illness is greater with EEEV, but it is rare to find EEEV in the Boston area.

Mosquitoes are most active between July and September, but if the weather remains warm, the risk period can extend to November.

In order to prevent mosquito bites, consider taking the following steps:

- Use a mosquito repellent. The most effective repellents contain DEET, but there are several alternatives approved by the EPA. Read the directions on the product label for precautions that need to be taken and to find out how often to reapply the repellent. If you use a product containing DEET, use concentrations less than 30% for adults and the lowest concentration available for children.
- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants and socks when mosquitoes may be out
- Although mosquitoes can bite at any time of day, try to limit time outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair. This will help prevent mosquitoes from getting inside.

Mosquitoes need water to breed and can develop into adults in as little as one week. In order to keep mosquitoes from breeding, take the following steps.

- Turn over or cover unused flowerpots, buckets, garbage cans, and wheelbarrows.
- Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water
- Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use. Keep swimming pool covers clear of water and debris.
- Cover or dispose of old tires. They are one of mosquitoes' favorite places to breed.

If you find a dead bird in Boston, call the State Laboratory Institute (SLI) at 1-866- MASS-WNV. Although not all birds will be tested, it is very important that all dead birds are reported. Large numbers of dead birds in an area may be a sign that mosquitoes are carrying disease.

For more information on mosquito-borne illness, contact the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-5611, or visit our website at www.bphc.org/cdc

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

May 2006

Vaccination Protects Everyone

It used to be that measles, chickenpox and other childhood diseases were a right of passage. Children gained immunity by getting these diseases from their friends and schoolmates. In the days before vaccine, almost everyone got measles as a child.

In the mid-20th century, the list of standard childhood vaccinations grew to include one disease after another. A series of shots replaced childhood illnesses as the right of passage and the change saved many lives. Because

“everyone got it,” people often think of such childhood diseases as harmless. In fact, most people do recover without incident. But one person in a thousand develops encephalitis, a dangerous swelling of the brain. A pregnant woman who gets measles may also miscarry, give birth prematurely, or have a low-birth-weight baby.



Dr. Anita Barry, Director of Communicable Disease Control for the Boston Public Health Commission, receives a measles vaccination

Today, measles is rare because vaccination is so widespread. In Massachusetts, vaccination is a requirement for students to start school and vaccination rates are very high throughout most of the United States.

When enough people in a community are immune to an infectious disease, it stops the spread of that disease. The practice even protects people who don't get immunized, because the people around them cannot transmit the disease.

Boston has gone seven years without a case of measles, until this spring. But over the past month, eight Boston workers have contracted measles. The first individual caught the disease overseas.

The Public Health Commission has been working steadily since the first case appeared to prevent the spread of illness. However, three factors conspire to make this a challenging situation.

- Measles is very contagious. The virus is airborne. It can also remain active in indoor air for up to two hours. People who get measles can infect others for a day or two before they have any symptoms.

- Everyone in a community doesn't have to be vaccinated to stop the spread of a disease. However, stopping very contagious diseases requires that most people be vaccinated. Disease trackers estimate that 95% of the people in a community must be immune to stop measles from spreading. This is called community immunity or "herd" immunity.
- When the first measles vaccines were developed, there were a few different approaches. Some vaccines did not give long-lasting immunity. Some individuals who were vaccinated in the early 60's (until about 1968) are actually not protected.

What's all this mean to me?

This cluster of cases affects a very limited number of people. Still, it's a reminder of how important immunization is. Especially if you were born between 1957 (when measles was so widespread that nearly everyone got it) and 1968, take a few moments to check your vaccination status. Your parents, your childhood doctor, or your school may have vaccination records. If you received two doses of Measles/Mumps/Rubella (MMR) vaccine or a live virus vaccine you are protected.

You can also get a blood test to see if you are immune to measles. If you're not – or even if you don't know – it's prudent to ask your doctor about getting immunized. Maintaining a high level of "community immunity" is what has made measles so rare.

For additional information on measles, vaccination, and the current cluster of cases, see visit the Boston Public Health Commission web site at: www.bphc.org/cdc.



Boston Health Notes

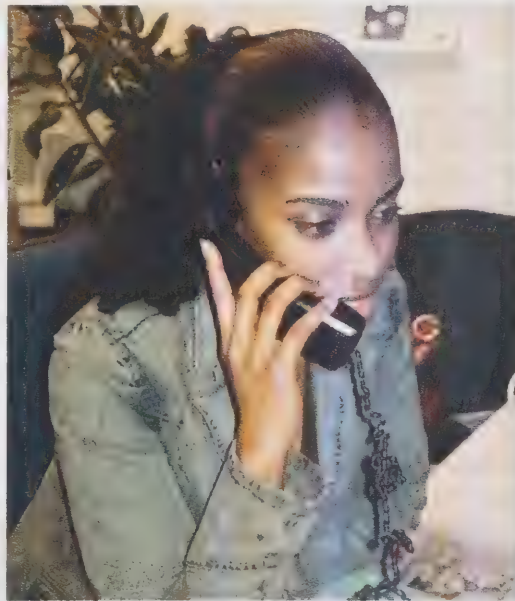
*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

May 2006

Twenty Years of Improving Health Care Access *One Caller at a Time*

The problem of affordable access to health insurance and health care has been with us for a long time. But 20 years ago this spring, Boston residents gained an ally in their struggle to find solutions. In 1984 the Boston Committee on Access to Health Care (BCAHC) identified several problems facing Boston's uninsured residents.

They found that many residents faced long delays when they tried to make an appointment, were unable to see the same doctor regularly and received lower quality care than their neighbors. It was also clear that high medical and prescription drug cost placed a great financial burden on uninsured residents. The Committee worked on several fronts to eliminate these barriers. One promising approach was a telephone service that could immediately assist uninsured callers with obtaining appropriate and affordable care.



Emily Miranda, a health educator at the Boston Public Health Commission, advises a caller to the Mayor's Health Line

On March 27, 1986, the Mayor's Health Line began fielding calls from uninsured and underinsured residents and providing information, referral, and advocacy assistance. The program immediately began helping callers find affordable medical care and public or private health insurance plans. The Health Line also began documenting health care trends and access problems of the uninsured. Over the years, their reports have improved Boston's health care infrastructure in many ways, helping to shape the current project to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities and shedding light on the obstacles faced by the City's most vulnerable residents.

Today, the Mayor's Health Line continues to serve the needs of Boston's un- and under-insured, new residents, immigrants and those who are simply confused by a health care system that has grown ever more complex. It is an example of the kind of local government service that can and does make a difference in hundreds of lives.

The Mayor's Health Line

Callers to the Health Line reach an experienced professional who is prepared to answer a wide variety of health care access questions on-the-spot. Many of the Health Line staffers speak Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, or Cape Verdean Creole. Translation services are also

available for 130 other languages. Staff members help callers navigate through what can be a confusing and intimidating health care system. This free service links callers with programs run by the City, the State, hospitals and other community-based organizations, including:

- Health center and hospital care
- Public and private health insurance plans
- Prenatal care
- Primary and specialty services
- Breast cancer screenings
- HIV testing
- Immunizations
- Flu shots

Since its inception, the Mayor's Health Line has assisted a total of 129,443 callers. Most are seeking low-cost health insurance options or health care referrals. Recently, a single mother called the Health Line seeking insurance coverage for herself and her child. She was pregnant, new to the state, and didn't know where to turn for help. Health Line staff helped her with the application process for MassHealth. Soon, she and her son had coverage and she was able to choose a primary care provider, receive prenatal care for herself, and her seven-year old son was able to get dental care.

Facing a serious health problem can be scary. But signing up for insurance or finding a doctor doesn't need to be. If you or someone you know is uninsured or in need of health care supportive services, call the Mayor's Health Line to get the information you need today.

Contact Information

Mayor's Health Line 617-534-5050 or 1-800-847-0710

Boston Public Health Commission Website.....www.bphc.org



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

February, 2007

Delicious Drinks: Taste great and good for you

*Boston Public Health Commission releases free activity book for young kids
to teach them about healthy beverages.*

*Kathy Cunningham, MEd, RD, LD
Boston Public Health Commission*

What we drink is very important to good health. This is especially true when it comes to what children drink. Did you know that drinking a 20 ounce bottle of soda contains as much as 17 teaspoons of sugar? Other drinks that kids enjoy, such as flavored sports drink or sugar-sweetened fruit drinks, are not much better.

Too much sugar in drinks is obviously bad for teeth, but the number of calories contained in these drinks is just as unhealthy. That 20 ounce bottle, for example, can contain 320 calories -- or about 27% of a five year-old girl's total recommended daily calories¹. And the empty calories we *drink* tend to contribute to weight gain more than those we eat. It seems that drinking sweetened beverages doesn't contribute to feeling full in the same way that solid foods do. Sugar-sweetened beverages have contributed to a major problem of obesity in the United States as well as in Boston. Measurements of height and weight of Boston Public School first graders have found that 43% are heavier than the recommended healthy weight for their age.

Learning good eating and drinking habits starts early for kids. To assist parents and other caregivers in giving the right information, the Boston Public Health Commission has developed *Delicious Drinks!*, a free booklet to help teach children about making healthy and delicious drink choices. *Delicious Drinks!* has an interactive design for parents and young children to read together. It highlights healthy beverage selections, such as low -fat milk, plain and flavored waters, as well as a healthy fizzy drink that can be made easily at home. The booklet is being distributed to first graders in public and parochial schools across the city,

Delicious Drinks! was developed by the Commission's Boston Steps Healthy Eating Team and Jessica Blom-Hoffman, PhD, a professor at Northeastern University. Boston Public School students illustrated the booklet. To receive more information on healthy beverages, please contact Boston Steps, 617-534-5684 or visit the Commission's website, <http://www.bphc.org>.

¹ American Heart Association



Boston Health Notes

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April, 2007

Public Health Emergency Planning: How Can You Prepare?

By Suzanne Crowther, Director of Emergency Preparedness Division, Boston Public Health Commission

In the last few years, there has been a lot of talk about “emergency preparedness.” But what does that really mean? Individual preparedness means creating a plan that will help you and your family know what to do in the event of an emergency. This can be for a natural disaster, or even a public health issue like pandemic flu. It may seem overwhelming, but it doesn’t have to be. There are basic steps that everyone can take to prepare.

How Can You Prepare for an Emergency?

1) Unexpected events can happen at anytime. Though Boston has made great strides to prepare the city for emergencies, it is important that individuals plan as well. Follow these simple steps to prepare yourself and your family *IF* there is ever an emergency. (Think about the specific needs of your household or family.)

- Make an emergency supply kit
- Create a family communication plan
- Pick a meeting place for your family and friends
- Get to know your neighbors
- Find out what your school’s emergency plan is
- Take a CPR or First Aid course

2) Neighborhood groups throughout the city have joined the Boston Public Health Commission to help every resident prepare for an emergency. In the next few months, these groups will be hosting meetings for their neighbors about basic steps and preparing for a public health emergency like pandemic flu. Attend one of these meetings to learn how you can create a plan for you and your family.

3) On Wednesday, April 4th, 2007 from 10am-1pm the Boston Public Health Commission Public Health Van will be at G&G Auto Service Center located at 682 Cummins Highway in Mattapan. The Van will provide free health screenings, health insurance application assistance, and will offer emergency preparedness materials for your family. Visit the van to learn more about protecting your health, especially in the event of an emergency. All are welcome.

Information and Help

For more detailed information about the basic steps you can take, call Ready Boston at 617-635-4500 or visit <http://www.cityofboston.gov/emergency/ReadyBoston.asp>. You can also contact the Boston Public Health Commission's Emergency Preparedness Division at 617-534-2333 (www.bphc.org/prepare) for more information about public health emergency planning.

Other helpful websites:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

<http://www.mass.gov/dph/topics/emerppreparedness.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.bt.cdc.gov



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

May, 2007

MassHealth Helps You Kick the Habit and Control Asthma

by Margaret Reid, RN, Director, Asthma Prevention & Control, Boston Public Health Commission

You wake up every night coughing. You can't climb a flight of stairs without feeling out of breath. You know that smoking is bad for your health –particularly bad for your asthma, but quitting is so hard.

If you are:

- not sleeping due to asthma
- missing work or school due to asthma
- using your rescue inhaler regularly
- and sitting out normal physical activity

Your asthma may be out of control and your doctor or nurse will want to know about it.

May is Asthma Awareness Month – the perfect time to quit smoking and get control of your asthma!

If you are on MassHealth, quitting may have gotten a little easier. Last July 1, MassHealth introduced a new tobacco treatment benefit for its members; Neighborhood Health Plan and BMC Health Net members have the same benefit. Recently, representatives of Boston health centers and hospitals completed training to prepare them to work with smokers, ensuring there are qualified tobacco cessation counselors to serve Boston residents, in multiple languages.

Make an appointment to see your doctor or nurse. Let them know you are ready to quit smoking. Make sure they know that MassHealth reimburses for tobacco counseling, intake and assessment, and for prescription medicine and nicotine replacement therapy (patch, lozenge, gum). Quitting smoking is hard and MassHealth will cover up to two full quit attempts a year.



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Quitting smoking and keeping tobacco smoke out of your home and car will make you and your family healthier. The Boston Public Health Commission has resources to help you get your asthma under control, quit smoking, and make your home smoke free.

Go to the BPHC website at www.bphc.org and click on Today's Health or call the Tobacco Control Program at (617) 534-4718 or the Asthma Program at (617) 534-5966.

Download the Smoke Free Home Pledge. Check off the actions you will take to make your home smoke free. Post the pledge on the refrigerator to remind yourself and friends and family that your home is smoke free.

Download the Asthma Control Checklist. Fill it out and take it to your doctor or nurse. This will let them know if your asthma is under control. If you are having frequent symptoms, they may prescribe a medicine to take every day and discuss things in your environment that could be making your asthma worse. Ask about an Asthma Action Plan.

There is help available even if you do not have insurance or live outside of Boston. Contact www.trytostop.org or the 1-800-Try-To-Stop hotline to find information on tobacco treatment services near you.

If you need help finding health insurance or health care services, contact the Mayor's Health Line at 617.534.5050.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

July, 2007

Stay Ahead! Test for Lead

by Thomas Plant, Director, Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, Boston Public Health Commission

Lead Poisoning Prevention Week

Every year, approximately 310,000 children across the United States are poisoned by lead. To raise awareness about the importance of testing children for lead, the Boston Public Health Commission's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is providing free lead screenings during Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, July 14-21. Parents and caretakers are invited to bring their children who are under age six to be tested at the Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center in Allston on July 20th from 10:00am to 12:00pm

Dangers of Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning can affect nearly every nervous system in a child's body, often with no noticeable symptoms. Lead poisoning can affect growth and development, speech and hearing, and cause learning or behavior problems. The only way to find out if your child has lead poisoning is to have a blood lead test. Have children tested for lead at ages 1, 2, 3, and 4, especially if you live in a high risk area: North Dorchester, Hyde Park, South Dorchester, Mattapan, Roslindale, Roxbury, Allston-Brighton, Charlestown, and East Boston.

Protecting Your Child From Lead Poisoning

Boston is well on its way to becoming the first major city to eliminate lead poisoning; however, there are still significant environmental health risks for families with children. The most common way children are lead poisoned is from being exposed to lead paint, which is usually found in homes built before 1978. During renovation work, lead dust settles on toys and floors and children become poisoned by putting toys and their hands in their mouths. Do your part by preventing childhood lead poisoning:



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- With your children: wash their hands before they eat and sleep; wash their toys often; feed them foods rich in iron, calcium, and vitamin C;
- In your home: have a licensed inspector test for lead; only allow a trained or licensed professional to scrape or sand paint surfaces; use paper towels and a water sprayer to clean up dust in window sills; and wet mop your floors weekly;
- First-time home buyers: before signing the paperwork and taking the deed, make sure the previous owner has had the property inspected for lead paint.

For More Information

Contact the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (617) 534-5966 or www.bphc.org/leadpoisoning for more information about the following:

- Testing children for lead poisoning
- Free in-home lead inspections
- Free Moderate Risk Deleading Classes



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

August, 2007

Reaching a Milestone: DelValle Celebrates 10,000 Participant

by Brad Cohen, Director, DelValle Institute for Emergency Preparedness, Boston Public Health Commission

Recently, the DelValle Institute for Emergency Preparedness reached a milestone: training its 10,000th participant. This milestone represents over three years of hard work and dedication from Institute staff as well as the commitment of local, regional, statewide, and federal partners to strengthen the City of Boston's ability to respond to health-related challenges.

Who We Are

The DelValle Institute is a program of the Boston Public Health Commission and Boston Emergency Medical Services. The Institute draws on the best in the public health, health care, and public safety fields to create and deliver programs that educate, inspire, and prepare, creating a healthier and safer community for all of Boston's service providers, visitors, and residents.

The DelValle Institute was founded in 2003 and is named in honor of Manuel "Manny" DelValle, Jr., a New York City Firefighter killed while responding at the World Trade Center. DelValle was the son of Dr. Peter Moyer, Medical Director for Boston's Public Safety Agencies. The Institute prepares the Boston community to respond to health challenges in ways that protect Metro Boston's first responders, care providers, and Boston residents.

Our Trainings

Pandemic flu, anthrax, terrorism, smallpox, natural disasters – these are subjects that can understandably create fear and uncertainty. The DelValle Institute aims to reduce fear and uncertainty by educating first responders about these topics, including how to protect themselves and residents and to prepare for any unforeseen outcomes from these potential events. Trainings are tailored specifically for each group of first responders to learn their important roles as well as the critical needs of the City of Boston.

The Institute also trains community agencies who work most closely with the City's diverse mix of residents. Recently, there has been a series of trainings with Community Health Centers throughout Boston. This series updated Community Health Center staff on some of the latest developments in preparedness while, at the same time, providing an opportunity for the Institute to learn about the challenges faced by the Health Centers on a daily basis. This two-way learning allows the DelValle Institute to develop trainings on topics most important to the Health Centers.

Another community-based initiative, in collaboration with the Boston Area Health Education Center, trains Medical Interpreters working with healthcare organizations in emergency preparedness topics and emergency response procedures. These Interpreters are trained so that in an emergency, non-native English speakers can have complex medical issues and procedures explained to them in their native languages.

Our Future

The DelValle Institute continues to grow. It currently has exciting job openings for professional educators with experience in public health, public safety, and/or emergency preparedness. With the 10,000 participant milestone surpassed, the Institute looks forward to training its next 10,000. Each year new threats to public safety emerge and the DelValle Institute will continue to adapt its trainings. The more people the Institute trains the better prepared the Metro Boston area will be for any health challenge that comes our way.

For More Information

To learn more about the courses offered by the DelValle Institute, or for information about employment opportunities visit us on the web at www.bphc.org/delvalle.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

April, 2008

Climate Change and Public Health – What You Can Do To Help

by Paul Shoemaker, MPH; Associate Director, Environmental Health Office

National Public Health Week is April 7 through 13, 2008. This year's theme is, *Climate Change: Our Health in the Balance*. The Boston Public Health Commission is encouraging residents to take steps to reduce climate change and protect their health.

By now, most people have heard of climate change or global warming. Both of these terms describe a process that scientists have been studying for several decades – the planet as a whole is getting warmer. That doesn't mean that we've seen the last of snow in Boston or that every day will be a record high, but it does mean that the average temperature throughout the year is going up slowly but steadily. The result is changes in weather patterns, such as more heat waves and sudden cold snaps, which can have a serious impact on our health.

- Longer, warmer, and wetter summers can encourage the growth of mosquitoes that can carry West Nile Virus or Eastern Equine Encephalitis;
- Heat waves can put the elderly and people with health problems in danger of heat stroke, heart attacks, and other life-threatening events;
- Severe storms (in winter and summer) can cause flooding, damage property, but also promote mold growth in homes, which can trigger asthma;
- Extreme cold snaps raise heating bills putting those without proper housing and heating at risk of frostbite, hypothermia, and death.

What You Can Do

The City of Boston and the Public Health Commission are working in a number of ways to reduce climate change and prepare for its impact. On April 13, 2007 Mayor Menino issued an executive order setting greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals for the city. These include reducing our annual greenhouse gas emissions seven percent below 1990 levels by 2012 and 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The executive order also establishes policies for efficient buildings, renewable energy, and the use of hybrid



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vehicles. As part of this initiative, the Boston Public Health Commission and city partners launched a new hybrid taxi, called CleanAir Cabs.

The city has taken major steps to reduce climate change, but we still have a long way to go. There are steps that every Bostonian can take to reduce the use of fossil fuels (gasoline, coal, oil, natural gas) and therefore reduce climate change:

- **Unplug your chargers.** Any device that has a charger uses electricity if the charger is plugged in, even if the device is turned off or not attached. Unplugging the charger cord can save you money on your electric bill and help protect the environment.
- **Turn off lights and electronics.** Even if you'll only be out of the room for a couple of minutes, save electricity by turning off the lights. Make sure electronics like televisions, stereos, and computers are turned off when you're not using them. Think about plugging these into a power strip with an on/off switch that you can turn off when not in use.
- **Save gas.** Combine several errands into one trip to save on gas. Keep your car in good shape (regular servicing and tune-ups, keep the tires properly inflated, etc.) to get the best mileage possible out of your car. Whenever you can, consider walking or public transportation.
- **Be prepared.** Get together a kit of important items that you will need in case of a weather emergency or other major event. You can find instructions and help with putting together an emergency kit at www.ready.gov.

For more information on how you can take action to reduce your carbon footprints:

- BPHC: http://www.bphc.org/bphc/hcities_climatehome.asp
- City of Boston: <http://www.cityofboston.gov/climate/default.asp>
- Take a CleanAir Cab <http://www.bphc.org/bphc/cleanaircabs.asp>
- The Commission's Environmental Health Office at 617-534-5966.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

June, 2008

Preventing West Nile Virus and Other Mosquito-borne Illness

by Kimberly Martin, RN, MAT Health Educator, Boston Public Health Commission

Summer is a time for fun, a time to sit back and enjoy the outdoors. However, in the United States, the last few summers have also brought concern about mosquito-borne illness like West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus (EEEV).

Both viruses, WNV and EEEV, can be transmitted to humans from infected mosquitoes that get the viruses from birds. The risk of WNV infection following a mosquito bite is very low. Most people infected with WNV do not get sick or experience only mild symptoms. However, a small number of people, especially the elderly, develop more serious illness. Last year, one person was diagnosed with WNV in Boston after becoming ill. The risk of serious illness is greater with EEEV, but it is rare to find EEEV in the Boston area.

Mosquitoes are most active between July and September, but if the weather remains warm, the risk period can extend to November.

To prevent mosquito bites, consider taking the following steps:

- Use a mosquito repellent. The most effective repellents contain DEET, but there are several alternatives approved by the Environmental Protection Agency, including oil from lemon eucalyptus tree or soybean-oil-based products. Read the directions on the product label for precautions that need to be taken and to find out how often to reapply the repellent;
- If you use a product containing DEET, adults should use concentrations that are less than 30 percent and the lowest concentration available should be used on children. Apply DEET to exposed skin only (but not the eyes or mouth) and do not use on open cuts or wounds. Do not let children apply DEET themselves. Do not apply DEET on infants (mosquito netting can be used over infant carriers);
- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks when mosquitoes may be out;



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- Although mosquitoes can bite at any time of day, try to limit time outdoors between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active;
- Make sure window and door screens are in good repair. This will help prevent mosquitoes from getting inside.

Mosquitoes need water to breed and can develop into adults in as little as one week. To keep mosquitoes from breeding, take the following steps.

- Turn over or cover unused flowerpots, buckets, garbage cans, and wheelbarrows;
- Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water;
- Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use. Keep swimming pool covers clear of water and debris;
- Cover or dispose of old tires. They are one of mosquitoes' favorite places to breed.

The city of Boston has a comprehensive plan to reduce the risk of mosquito-borne illness. The first part involves monitoring and testing adult mosquitoes and birds in the area to identify infections. The second focuses on source reduction, such as removing standing water, which mosquitoes need to breed. Several city agencies work together to educate the public about source reduction and to monitor areas that have been identified as potential breeding sites to ensure they are cleaned up. The third step is the placement of larvacide in the city's catch basins, a prime mosquito breeding location.

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) coordinates with the William A. Hinton State Laboratory Institute to follow-up on results of positive mosquito samples or dead birds. If you find a dead bird in Boston, call the Massachusetts reporting number at 1-866- MASS-WNV. Although not all birds will be tested, it is very important that all dead birds are reported. Large numbers of dead birds in an area may be a sign that mosquitoes are carrying disease.

For more information on mosquito-borne illness, contact the Boston Public Health Commission at 617-534-5611, or visit our website at www.bphc.org/cdc.



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

June, 2008

HIV: Know Your HIV Status?

*by Rhoda Johnson-Tuckett, Manager HIV/AIDS Prevention/Education,
AIDS Program, Boston Public Health Commission*

Prevention and education are powerful tools in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, testing remains a controversial subject in many communities because of concerns about confidentiality and stigma associated with the disease. The unfortunate result is that many people do not know their HIV status, the disease spreads, and the epidemic continues. National HIV Testing Day on Friday, June 27, is a good opportunity for people to commit themselves to getting tested.

The US Centers for Disease Control recommends that HIV testing become a part of routine health care. HIV screening is recommended for all patients ages 13 to 64 in all health care settings. Persons at highest risk for HIV infection, such as those with multiple sex partners, should be screened for HIV at least annually. New rapid oral testing is available that provides results in 20 minutes using saliva, and requires no needles.

In 2006, the last year for which figures were available, there were 194 new HIV/AIDS cases in Boston, according to the Health of Boston report released last month. A majority of those cases involved residents in the South End.

To protect yourself and your partner, it is important to get tested regularly. Newly developed rapid testing processes are non-invasive, fast, and extremely accurate. For those who fear exposure to HIV, the sooner you know your status the sooner you can access quality and specialized care. Treatment options have advanced along with testing procedures, but are most successful when accessed early. Regular, routine testing can help ensure timely delivery of much needed medical care.

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National HIV Testing Day

To commemorate National HIV Testing Day on June 27, the Boston Public Health Commission is partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to distribute 500 rapid testing kits to five local community health organizations. The organizations will have extended hours on that day to conduct HIV rapid testing made possible by a donation of the kits from OraSure and the National Association of People With AIDS. All testing and counseling sessions are strictly confidential.

Information and Help

The Commission offers a full range of services and/or referrals. You can also call local community health centers or community-based organization for HIV counseling and testing information. For National HIV Testing Day, the Commission will partner with the following five agencies for free rapid oral testing:

AIDS Action Committee	(617) 437-6200
Codman Square Health Center	(617) 825-9660
Fenway Community Health Center	(617) 267-0900
Sidney Borum Health Center (JRI)	(617) 451-8140
Latino Health Institute	(617) 350-6900

Websites:

http://www.bphc.org/bphc/aids_supportservices.asp

<http://www.gettestedboston.org>

<http://www.HIVtest.org>

<http://www.AAC.org/Hotline>



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

July, 2008

Kids Can't Fly: Protect Your Child from Window Falls

by Erin Christiansen, program director, Childhood Injury Prevention Program, Boston Public Health Commission

With the arrival of hot summer weather, families across Boston will open their windows to let in a cool breeze. When there are small children in the home, an open window can be dangerous. Kids will explore everywhere imaginable, and they are fast. It only takes a minute for a child to climb onto furniture located next to an open window. Every year children playing near unprotected windows are hurt from serious falls. This year two young children have fallen from windows in Boston neighborhoods.

One Step Ahead

As parents and caregivers, we can protect our children from window falls. The best way to prevent all kinds of injury to children is to keep an eye on them. Supervision is important, and sometimes a babysitter or an older sibling will not recognize the possible danger of an open window. Adults should be aware that window falls, particularly in apartments and large urban areas, can lead to severe injuries and are often fatal. At the site of the fall in Hyde Park this month, the child fell from a fourth floor window. Improving the safety of the home by securing the windows can prevent these tragedies.

Safety Tips

1. Lock all unopened doors and windows.
2. Move chairs, cribs, beds, and anything a child can climb away from windows.
3. Open windows from the top if possible.
4. Install window safety guards.

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What are window safety guards?

Window safety guards are aluminum or steel bars with four-inch spacing that are installed in the bottom half of a window. There are two kinds of window guards: those that are permanently installed and those that have a hidden release feature which allows escape in the case of an emergency. Every room should have one window or fire escape that is not covered by a permanently installed guard.

Who needs window guards?

Window guards are recommended for windows on the second story and above, or on any floor that is 10 feet above ground. Homes with children under age seven should install guards. Remember that window screens are designed to keep bugs out but are not strong enough to stop a child from falling.

Where are window guards available?

Many local hardware stores and home improvement stores carry window guards.

Boston residents and property owners can purchase low-cost window guards at Boston Building Materials Co-op, located at 100 Terrace St. Roxbury, MA 02120. (617) 442-2262.

For more information or educational materials, contact the Boston Public Health Commission's Childhood Injury Prevention Program at 617-534-5197 or visit www.bphc.org/kidscantfly.

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

September, 2008

Is Your Family Prepared?

By Mea Allen, Emergency Preparedness Educator, DelValle Institute for Emergency Preparedness, Boston Emergency Medical Services, Boston Public Health Commission

If there is a fire in your house, do you have a plan to make sure that you and your family are safe? What if you have no electricity for several days, or you need to evacuate your home? Every emergency is different, but there are some basic steps that you can take to stay safe while your local emergency workers restore the community. Just like wearing your seat belt, preparing makes sense. ***Get ready now.***

September is National Preparedness Month

National Preparedness Month is a nationwide effort held each September to encourage Americans to take simple steps to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses and schools. Take some time this month to review your emergency plan.

How to Prepare for an Emergency

- **Get a Kit** – You should have an **Emergency Supply Kit** ready to sustain your family for 3-5 days without power. Your kit should include the basics for your survival and safety, such as:
 - ✓ Water: one gallon of water per person per day, for at least 3 days
 - ✓ Food: at least a 3-day supply of non-perishable food, plus a can opener to open it
 - ✓ First-aid kit: basic first-aid supplies plus a supply of your daily medications
 - ✓ A flashlight, a battery-powered radio, and extra batteries
 - ✓ Copies of important documents (birth certificates, bank account numbers, etc.)

To see a complete list of supplies to put in your kit, go to www.ready.gov.



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- **Make a Plan** - You should also have a **Family Communication Plan**, so that you know how you will contact each other and how you will get back together. Each family member should keep a copy of the plan with them at all times. Your plan should include:
 - ✓ An out-of-state contact for all family members to call if you are separated
 - ✓ Two meeting spots: one within your community, and one outside your community
 - ✓ Plans for caring for your pets in an emergency

To find out more about creating your plan, go to www.ready.gov.

- **Be Informed** – Make sure you know the location of your Neighborhood Emergency Center, where you can go to get information and find out what to do. Also, learn about the emergency plans at the workplace, schools, nursing homes, and other facilities used by your family.

To find out the location of your Neighborhood Emergency Center, call 617-635-4500 between the hours of 9-5.

- **Get Involved** – The City of Boston is actively recruiting medical and non-medical volunteers to join the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC). Join the MRC at www.bostonMRC.org, or call 617-534-9200 for more information.

Mayor's 24-hour hotline

617-635-4500

Boston Public Health Commission, Office of Public Health Preparedness 617-534-2333,
php@bphc.org

Mayor's Office of Emergency Preparedness, Emergency Management 617-343-2400,
www.cityofboston.gov/emergency

Resources from the Department of Homeland Security www.ready.gov

-BPHC-

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

September 2008

Boston Medical Reserve Corps: Be One Of Boston's Everyday Heroes

*By Steph Sharp, Project Manager, Office of Public Health Preparedness, Boston
Emergency Medical Services, Boston Public Health Commission*

September is National Preparedness Month, an opportunity to highlight the importance of being prepared so that your family and community remain safe in the case of an emergency. However, regardless of what month it is, every household should take steps to be prepared, just as the Boston Medical Reserve Corps (Boston MRC) is charged with preparing the entire city.

What is the Boston MRC?

The Boston MRC is a group of volunteers who are ready to respond should there be a public health emergency here in Boston. In an emergency, volunteers perform a wide range of tasks aimed at keeping the city safe and healthy. For example, volunteers may be called upon to dispense medication to city residents. Volunteers also provide critical support at planned events like the city's Fourth of July celebration and the Boston Marathon.

Who volunteers for the Boston MRC?

Many of us ask, "Is there something small I can do to make a big difference for my community?" The answer is yes. Join the Boston Medical Reserve Corps and have a positive impact on your community. Our volunteers are everyday people who live and work in the city of Boston. You don't need a medical background to volunteer with the Boston MRC. Everyone has an important skill to offer, and we're always looking for:

- Multilingual volunteers
- Community leaders
- Those experienced with special needs populations
- Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals
- Everyday citizens with a desire to help Boston during an emergency

Do I need special training to volunteer?

Once you sign up online at www.bostonmrc.org, all of the training for the MRC is offered for free. You will have the opportunity to complete an orientation either online or in person. After that, if you're interested in taking on a larger role, free leadership level training is offered and volunteers help with activation simulations, drills, and other special events.

What kind of time commitment is involved with volunteering?

Joining the Boston Medical Reserve Corps takes just 10 minutes online. The only other mandatory commitment is an hour long volunteer orientation, though Boston MRC volunteers could be called at any time for an emergency. Volunteers will be activated through a telephone alert system once it is safe to respond.

I want to help -sign me up!

Everyday heroes like you help keep Boston safe and prepared. Join the Boston MRC. The time commitment is small, the training is free, and joining is easy.

1. Submit a volunteer application at www.bostonmrc.org
2. Complete our orientation either online or in person
3. You're ready to go. In an emergency you'll be called to help

Contact

Steph Sharp
Boston Medical Reserve Corps
617.343.1094
volunteer@bphc.org

SIGN UP TODAY at www.BostonMRC.org



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

October 2008

Fall: Time to gear up for flu season

*By Kim Martin, RN, MAT, Health Educator, Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division*

Each year fall arrives with changing leaves, a chill in the air, and, in many places throughout the United States, the start of the influenza (“flu”) season. Although it is impossible to predict exactly when flu will appear in Boston, it usually arrives in late fall and lasts until early spring. Vaccines are expected to be plentiful during the 2008-2009 flu season and public health officials are advising the public to think about getting a flu shot now.

What is the flu and how does it spread?

Flu, an illness caused by a virus, can lead to symptoms including a sudden fever, cough, muscle ache, headache, and general weakness. The flu is spread when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks and others nearby breathe in the germ. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be particularly dangerous for the very young, the very old, and for those with underlying medical problems.

Prevent the Flu

1. **Get a flu shot:** A person needs to get a flu immunization every year to be fully protected. Two types of immunizations are available to protect against the flu. One is a shot given in the arm and the other is a spray given in the nose.

Those encouraged to get a flu shot are children age six months through 18 years, pregnant women, persons 50 years of age and older, residents living in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, persons of any age with chronic medical conditions, and those who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from the flu (such as healthcare workers, household contacts, or caregivers of persons at high risk).

The flu spray immunization (sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”) is approved for use in healthy people between the ages of 2 and 49 who are not pregnant. Both the spray and the injection methods can be effective at preventing the flu.

Flu immunization is not recommended for infants younger than six months of age and those who have had a severe allergic (anaphylactic) reaction to eggs or to a previous dose of a flu immunization. Persons with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a severe



illness that causes paralysis) should talk to their healthcare provider before getting a flu shot.

2. **Cover your cough:** Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue every time you cough or sneeze and then throw the used tissue in a waste basket. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve;
3. **Clean your hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleaner, especially after coughing or sneezing;
4. **Limit contact:** If possible limit contact with persons who are sick or stay home when you are sick. Avoid sharing items such as eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels, or other personal items, especially with people who are ill.

Caring for People at Home with the Flu

In addition to encouraging those at risk to get a flu vaccine, the Boston Public Health Commission is also working on a statewide educational initiative, "Flu: What You Can Do," designed to teach the public how to care for loved ones at home who are sick with the flu.

These materials detail when and how to treat a fever, nasal congestion, and cough; how to take a temperature, prevent dehydration, encourage good nutrition, and provide comfort to those who are ill.

More Information

For more information, please contact the Boston Public Health Commission Communicable Disease (CDC) Division at 617-534-5611 or visit our website at <http://www.bphc.org/cdc>



Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

October 2008

The Importance of Sexuality Education

By Rosie Munoz-Lopez, MPH, Director, Maternal and Child Health Division, Boston Public Health Commission

As parents, we try to protect our children and provide them with as much information as possible so they can make good choices. Like teaching them their ABC's, preparing them balanced meals, and fitting their first bike helmet, sexuality education is a critical part of keeping our children healthy.

From an early age, children are bombarded with conflicting sexual messages through advertising, music, and other media. In Boston and nationwide, sexually transmitted diseases among youth continue to climb at an alarming rate. However, studies show that kids who talk openly with their parents are less likely to engage in risky behavior.

Many of us come from homes and families where there was no discussion about sex or sexuality so it is understandable that parents may not know where to begin. The topic can be intimidating for parents and providers alike. And, no matter how open, educated, or ready we think we are, we often find ourselves stumbling for the right words.

The reality is that although we may feel uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality, we must. Parents are in a unique position to help shape children's attitudes, values, and behaviors about sexuality education.

The best advice is to start early. Don't wait for them to ask you the proverbial "Where do babies come from?" question. Teach them the correct name for their body parts. If they tell you they are uncomfortable being touched in a certain manner, respect their feelings and boundaries. Talk to them about how to express love and intimacy in age-appropriate ways. Be a good role model as kids learn from both watching and listening.

Sexuality education also includes instilling good decision-making in all aspects of their lives: Teach them (and show them) the importance of taking responsibility for their

- more -

- Page Two -

choices and actions. By providing a good foundation and supporting their sense of self they will learn to honor their bodies and set boundaries. This will set the stage for how they make decisions about their sexual health later in life.

Most importantly, continue to communicate. By being open to their questions, you can create an atmosphere that allows you to share your own thoughts and concerns.

Even if you are starting from square one, don't worry. There are numerous resources available to help you communicate these issues effectively. You may still have to settle your nerves, but any advice from you on sexuality education is better than them relying on information from television. Here are a few reliable sources to turn to get you started:

- The Boston Public Health Commission: www.bphc.org has a full range of programs that can help guide you through various stages of your child's life, from infancy to adulthood;
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts: www.pplm.org has developed guidelines that will help you determine what to say and when it is appropriate to say it;
- Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS): www.SIECUS.org publishes and distributes accurate information about sexuality for professionals, parents, and the public. (Information also available in Spanish).

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Boston Health Notes

*A monthly column of the Boston Public Health Commission
& Mayor Thomas M. Menino*

February 2009

Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Boston's New Tobacco Restrictions

*by Margaret Reid, Director, Division of Healthy Homes and Community Supports,
Boston Public Health Commission*

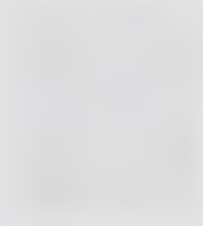
Smoking and secondhand smoke can make people sick. Tobacco is a factor in most leading causes of death in Boston: cancer, heart disease, stroke, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Even non-smokers inhaling secondhand smoke can experience these health effects. Among children and infants, exposure to secondhand smoke causes low birth weights, increases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, and contributes to asthma and other respiratory infections.

The Boston Public Health Commission has taken new steps to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and to make tobacco products less accessible.

Among those steps are:

- Tobacco products cannot be sold in any health institution, including pharmacies or drug stores, or in grocery stores that contain pharmacies.
- Tobacco products cannot be sold in any business operating on property owned by an educational institution.
- Smoking will not be permitted in hotels, inns, lodging houses, or bed and breakfasts operating in Boston. Smoking rooms will be eliminated.
- Smoking will not be allowed in outdoor workspaces that are adjacent to indoor workspaces. Examples include restaurant and hotel patios, loading docks, valet parking areas, and unenclosed floors of construction sites. Smoking is already prohibited in all indoor workspaces.



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In addition, signs and other material warning patrons at smoking bars, including hookah and cigar bars, of the hazards of smoking and secondhand smoke will be more visible.

Under the new regulations, the Boston Public Health Commission will not issue any new permits for smoking bars, and existing smoking bars will be allowed to operate for an initial period of no more than 10 years. Also, blunt wraps can no longer be sold in Boston.

Many of these measures go into effect Monday, Feb. 9. In some cases, establishments will be given additional time to comply with the new regulation. In addition to enforcement, the Commission will be providing educational and technical assistance to help businesses and institutions comply with the new rules.

These changes are designed to further protect the health of Boston workers, visitors and residents, especially youth. Evidence suggests that such strategies are effective in saving lives and discouraging new smokers.

In recent years, there has been overwhelming evidence that strict tobacco control regulations are effective in reducing disease and death. A recent study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Harvard School of Public Health shows that there were 16 percent or 577 fewer than expected heart attack deaths annually after the Massachusetts Smoke Free Workplace Law was enacted in 2004.

It's Time to Quit

Quitting smoking is hard and smokers often need help. The Boston Public Health Commission has been working with Boston health centers and hospitals to increase access to smoking cessation resources, such as free patches and counseling. This spring, the BPHC is working with Boston pharmacists to make smoking cessation resources available through neighborhood pharmacies. To find out about a smoking cessation program near you, go to the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program website at bphc.org and click on "Quit Smoking Today" or call the program at 617-534-4718. Join our efforts to build a Smoke-Free Boston.

- BPHC -

in addition, after the initial period of adjustment, the new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.

Under the new regulations, the business of the company will be more efficient and will be more reliable. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.

Many of these measures are being taken to improve the efficiency of the company. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.

These changes are being made to improve the efficiency of the company. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.

In recent years, the company has been making significant improvements in its operations. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.

It's Time to Go!

Looking forward to the future, the company is confident that it will continue to make significant improvements in its operations. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable. The new system will be more efficient and will be more reliable.



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